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THE HUMPHRIES TOUCH

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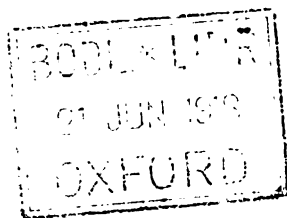
BY

FREDERICK WATSON

Author of 'THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE' ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE Springburns were securely entrenched in their first-class carriage when the outrage took place. There was, that is to say, Sir Daniel, an old Warrenderian, his son Charles Lucifer, a new Warrenderian, and their personal luggage. In the dining-car were reserved two seats for luncheon.

The guard, a Springburn half-crown in his trousers pocket, was waving his flag when the incredible happened. The door was jerked open to receive two absolute strangers. The compartment was not actually engaged. Speaking legally it contained two vacant seats. But a child could have perceived that the Springburns respected solitude. The two intruders were both very short, very square, and smooth-faced. One of them wore an Eton collar and a knickerbocker suit. The other had fallen into the habit of grown-up clothes and was completely bald. They were in other respects the same.

The Springburns were displeased. They sat perfectly motionless (being a very old family) and exchanged sympathetic glances. They were waiting for these persons to depart apologetically

into the corridor. After that they would forgive and forget—not before. The train moved out. The guard did not catch the menacing eye of Sir Daniel. He stared thoughtfully at the bookstall instead.

‘Pardon me, sir—but are these your bags?’

Someone had spoken. Sir Daniel started and looked up. He stared intently at the suit-cases.

‘They are,’ he said simply.

The stranger in trousers was not satisfied. His interest in the matter appeared to receive a fillip.

‘I’m afraid my son and I can’t sit on them,’ he pursued.

Sir Daniel considered the point. He was a little perplexed to know why anyone should regard his personal luggage so intimately. He had a presentiment such an action would not improve the leather. Beyond that he was at sea. Perhaps Charles Lucifer understood.

‘Come, sir, I cannot stand here all morning.’

Sir Daniel was stirred. He scented aggression. His mind flew to the alarm-cord, the attendant’s bell, a threat of proceedings. He took comfort in the thought that he was, if not actually a director, at least the brother-in-law of one; also the Unionist member for a Berkshire seat, and a magistrate. Not, he felt, with a touch of pathos, the kind of man to be hectored. At the same time it would be less disturbing upon a hot day to yield

(sarcastically). There were other ways of bringing such persons to their senses. He raised his ruddy face and, turning quite casually, stared over the English countryside. He simply did not reply. Unhappily there was no occasion. The suit-cases were already under the seat where they would get exceedingly dirty and scratched, the interlopers were comfortably established and already engaged in conversation.

It was hardly fair upon the Springburns, who are so old a family that the last distinguished member of their line fell at Agincourt; since when they have lived very quietly and seen very few people. They had, in this brief encounter, been swept off their feet. The only course left was to ignore the rest of the carriage, stare through them, pulverise them, behave as though they were not in the same county.

All this Sir Daniel proceeded to do. He caught the indignant eye of Charles Lucifer, shrugged his shoulders eloquently, lit an expensive cigar, and exchanged an unchristian smile. He even stole an amused glance at the enemy. Their conference had intensified. As the train howled into a tunnel Sir Daniel was aware that the stranger in the Eton collar was tabulating, with the aid of an enormous stylographic pen, quotations in the *Financial News*. It interested him. He had never seen a little boy

do that kind of thing before. He was the only Springburn who had ever known what the Stock Exchange was, and he had every reason for bewailing the distinction.

He stole another less casual glance and was arrested by the attitude of the elder stranger, who was simply suspended upon the words of the boy in the Eton collar. He hardly spoke. He just sat on the edge of his seat while his bald head smoked in the sunlight.

'Seen the *Graphic*, Charles?' asked Sir Daniel, in a loud paternal voice, just to regain his balance. His words died away. Charles Lucifer took the *Graphic* and stared at the strangers. Sir Daniel was on the point of repeating the sentence with the substitution of the word *Tatler*, when he, too, reluctantly turned his head and became instantly speechless. The boy in the Eton collar had unpacked a travelling typewriter, which the stranger with the bald head was manipulating to his dictation. Had Sir Daniel offered Charles Lucifer the entire contents of Smith's bookstalls nothing would have availed against that amazing spectacle.

But blood told. Several times Sir Daniel mastered his emotion and flung wild broken statements at Charles Lucifer. He reminded him that all the Springburns had been at Warrenders. He referred to his own boyhood, and all the things he

had come to believe he did. But the enemy never raised their heads. It might have been a commercial traveller cracking up wax vestas for all they seemed to care—especially the one in the Eton collar.

Taking a grip of himself, Sir Daniel raised his voice and told one or two steady old stories about the 'Varsity where Charles Lucifer was, of course, entered to continue. He was determined the carriage should hear. Whatever these fellows in the other corners might imagine, it was not for want of backbone he had ignored them. He awaited their servile laughter. He flung them a shrewd and not altogether hostile glance.

But the intruders never raised their heads. It might have been a curate over the tea-cups for all they seemed to care—especially the one in the Eton collar.

At that Sir Daniel fluttered his *Morning Post* as though there were flies about, and, with a snort, retired behind it. He had cut himself off from the world. It even amused him to overhear snatches of the fellows' conversation. He flattered himself he knew a thing or two about speculative markets, and something the boy in the Eton collar had just remarked about Kaffirs tickled him. As he had bought yesterday upon a tip from Sir Herbert Crump, his brother-in-law, he was of the

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opinion he ought to know. He had every hope that the market would touch twenty-five, and result in cherished improvements in the stable premises at Springburn.

The train pulled up. Along the platform a telegraph boy was crying 'Humphries,' and——

Sir Daniel awoke to the fact that the grown-up stranger was pushing past him. 'Pardon me,' he said, poised upon his right foot, 'my telegram.'

There were six. The boy in the Eton collar ripped them open.

'Kaffirs falling nicely,' he remarked, and Sir Daniel gripped his *Morning Post* so urgently that it ripped.

'I knew they'd drop to fifteen,' announced the boy in the Eton collar.

Sir Daniel uttered a derisive and incredulous laugh, and hurriedly read an advertisement for old clothing. He watched, with infinite stealth, several wires handed through the window. The incident concluded, the train moved out, and the interminable conversation was resumed. Both Springburns now sat openly, undisguisedly hypnotised.

'I hope, sir,' remarked the grown-up stranger suddenly, 'we aren't annoying you.'

Sir Daniel achieved an elaborate start.

'Oh, no—assuredly not,' he replied.

'I see you have your boy with you too.'

Sir Daniel stared hard at Charles Lucifer. It was true, but should he countenance the statement. Being a Parliamentarian, he may be said to have replied in the affirmative.

‘Going to school evidently—so is my son here,’ pursued the other breezily; ‘so is George Andrews. I may say, sir, that my name is Humphries. This is George Andrews—I am Hubert Henry.’

The mind of Sir Daniel was instantly clouded by an idea. He groped in darkness. The name of Hubert Henry Humphries was surely familiar. Was he not the financier? Or was it George Andrews? Or was it both? With the quiet heroism of his race he wrestled with this intricate problem in a grim Berkshire silence. Looking back upon the last half-hour it was suddenly borne in on him that he would give a tenner for a telegraph form and solitude. The word ‘nicely’ had hurt.

‘That boy,’ remarked the younger Humphries, deliberately indicating the incensed figure of Charles Lucifer, ‘that boy is wearing the Warrender colours; and, if I may add an amendment, not merely the Warrender but the Denver colours. I considered it judicious to acquaint myself with such items.’

His father never smiled. He turned upon Sir

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Daniel. 'Is that so?' he inquired. 'Is your youngster going to Warrenders?'

Sir Daniel was never more certain of anything in his life. The departure of Charles Lucifer caused him a satisfaction every father will understand. But he had lost the power of the monosyllable. (The family dropped it after Naseby.) He was also faced by the hot menace in the eye of Charles Lucifer. He was torn in two directions. With a blush of shame he again replied in the affirmative.

'I may say,' went on Mr. Hubert Humphries chattily, 'I may say, sir, that George Andrews here is fifteen, but small for his years. For several reasons I have kept him entirely under my charge since he was an infant. You express reasonable curiosity'—Sir Daniel expressed nothing whatever—'you ask was that course wise? Was it fair? Let me go further. Compared to your little boy' (the countenance of Charles Lucifer went scarlet with distress) 'he knows nothing.'

'Ah,' contributed Sir Daniel, in a strangled baritone.

'On the other hand, what he doesn't know about commerce isn't worth a ha'penny—I repeat it, sir—a ha'penny.'

At that cheerful testimony Sir Daniel's ill-judged

Kaffirs gripped him by the throat. He nodded with reservation.

'You ask my reasons for this procedure,' persisted Mr. Humphries. 'They are quite briefly these:—I have no belief whatever in the educational system of this country. It is mediæval. It is of no practical service. It leads nowhere and it crushes initiative. Most boys never recover from it. You look like a public school man yourself, sir.'

'My people,' replied Sir Daniel solemnly, 'have all been at Warrenders and Trinity'—he paused, ruminating—'except my great-uncle,' he added solemnly, and aware that he was on the brink of a confidence drew back, shot Mr. Humphries a distant glance and consulted his watch. There was, he was relieved to discover, barely fifteen minutes until luncheon.

'You ask,' rattled on Mr. Humphries, 'you ask naturally enough why George Andrews, who commands a great income, should come to Warrenders? The same question would occur to any commonplace man. And the answer is this—*trousers*.'

'I beg your pardon.'

'Trousers,' repeated Mr. Humphries. 'It's youth that is his cross. He must mark time, sir. So we compromised. We said: "Is there any-

thing in this public school business? Is it worth while?" George Andrews said: "No." But I saw further. There are occasions when I think, given certain qualities, a public school education is worth a heap; when it is a true friend.'

Sir Daniel admitted it.

'However dark things may look,' concluded Mr. Humphries, in the envious tone of a man not infrequently misjudged, 'however damaging the evidence, to have been at Eton explains a lot, sir. It appeals to the heart of the British people. There is nothing grander than a smashing reverse taken in the proper spirit. You could do it, sir—every time. On the other hand, I couldn't. It would crumple me up. I want George Andrews to have that card in his pack.'

Sir Daniel struggled in mental chaos. He was certain Mr. Humphries meant well. He was positive Mr. Humphries admired him. It was only a pity his meaning was lacking in clarity.

'But it makes me anxious. I haven't George Andrews' calm. Nothing shakes that boy, sir. On a rising market he often leaves 'Change for an ice-cream. I have known dressed crab—for which he has an unfortunate partiality—bring the shares down with a rush.'

Sir Daniel nodded courteously. He was moving in a Celtic twilight, through which one vague but

brightening star was shining. That star was the boy in the Eton collar. He was extraordinarily interested in George Andrews. He wanted to help George Andrews all he could. In the silence George Andrews took the typewriter upon his knee and knocked off a few personal memoranda.

'Your son,' remarked Mr. Humphries, returning to the attack, 'looks a pleasant ordinary English boy; normal, even stupid. You like him none the less for that,' he added warmly. 'By the way, what did you say your name was?'

Sir Daniel concentrated. Should he tell his name? Or should he not? He could not help feeling that there was an excellent material reason why he should.

'Springburn—er—Sir Daniel Springburn in fact.'

The typewriter ceased to click. George Andrews laid it quickly upon the seat, snatched up a handbag, opened it, drew out a copy of *Who's Who* and skimmed the pages. 'Here we are,' he said, in his business-like way.

'Read it out, George,' remarked Mr. Humphries.

'"Springburn, Sir Daniel Vavasour Le Marchant, 6th Bt., cr. 1685, J.P., M.P., b. Springburn, 3 August, 1860. S. of late Sir Daniel Christopher Springburn, Bt., and Lady Vosper Vosper, d. of 8th Marquis of St. Margaret's. M.

B

Evelyn, tenth daughter of Colonel Whishart Pembury Croome of Croome Hall, Berkshire.”’

‘Still this gentleman, George?’ asked Mr. Humphries.

“‘One son. Heir, Charles Lucifer. *Recreations*, Fishing, Hunting, Shooting. *Educ.* Warrenders, Trinity, Cambridge. *Address*, Springburn, Berks.; 6A Grosvenor Square, W. *Clubs*, Conservative, White’s, Marlborough, Royal Automobile——”’

‘That’ll do, George Andrews. That’s enough. I call that fine. Public School. I’d make a poor show beside that, George. I’d come down heavy. It’s different for you, my boy. Warrenders, Trinity——’

‘Take your seats for luncheon,’ cried a voice from the corridor.

‘Charles,’ said Sir Daniel briefly; ‘luncheon.’

He rose with dignity. Mr. Humphries rose too.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘I beg of you to remain. I cannot tell you how important I think it is that you should continue this conversation.’

Sir Daniel paused. The flush of anger still burned in his cheek.

‘I have a proposal—an important proposal to make to you.’

‘I will miss my luncheon,’ said Sir Daniel, stating quite simply a solemn and pregnant truth.

'It will be served here—I am a director of this line.'

Sir Daniel faltered. He remembered his Kaffirs and fell.

'Charles,' he said; 'go to luncheon,' and avoiding his son's contemptuous gaze turned hurriedly and sat heavily down.

Mr. Humphries rang for the attendant.

'Bring,' he ordered, 'three luncheons here. And the wine card.'

In the silence he crossed the carriage and occupied the seat vacated by Charles Lucifer.

'I was speaking of your boy,' he remarked; 'permit me to resume. I gather his name is Charles.'

'Charles Lucifer,' said Sir Daniel, becoming garrulous.

'Admirable,' commended Mr. Humphries. 'Charles is a wonderful name, couldn't convey more. Your son looks every inch a Charles. Now, sir, to business. I am a rich man, but I am a father; I have a father's heart. Now, George Andrews there is taking on a big thing. He is stepping into a strange world. He is a democratic progressive and a modern. I wonder if they will understand him at Warrenders.'

Sir Daniel crushed down his feeling on the matter. The anxious father turned suddenly on

the progressive. 'George Andrews,' he pleaded, 'be advised by me and eat less of that cream toffee.'

The attendant entered with dishes. Mr. Humphries ordered an excellent wine and continued.

'My proposal,' he said, 'is simply this. Your boy can learn much from George Andrews. In return he can teach him the ropes. He has the qualities of genius, Sir Daniel. While I am at his side I can restrain him. He is young, you understand, and sometimes a little indiscreet. He goes, shall we say, a little too far if unrestrained. A normal influence—that is what he requires.'

Sir Daniel began to see light. He realised for the first time how much a son like Charles Lucifer may mean to a loving father. He even had a vision of a self-supporting Charles, the first of the Springburns to make a fortune at Warrenders. His mind was dark with such schemings.

'What you have said,' he replied slowly, 'has impressed me. It has made me *think*.' He paused and at that momentous revelation the carriage was hushed, and Mr. Humphries, raising a slice of lamb to his mouth, laid down his fork again and was instantly grave.

'Think,' repeated Sir Daniel dreamily. 'It carries me back to my own young days. Had I learned business principles I might have been saved

many anxious hours. I am a fool in money matters, Mr. Humphries!'

'Coffee, sir?' asked the attendant.

'Cognac, Sir Daniel?' interrupted Mr. Humphries.

'If you please.'

'Two cognacs and cigars,' said Mr. Humphries.

'Why, only yesterday,' went on Sir Daniel, smiling pensively at the floor, 'I dabbled on the markets.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Humphries, without warmth.

'In Kaffirs,' laughed Sir Daniel, as though there were a joke somewhere.

'On the fall?'

'On the rise.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Humphries, and looked keenly at George Andrews. Then lighting a cigar he blew a cloud of smoke.

'To return to Warrenders,' he said, 'how does my suggestion strike you?'

Sir Daniel sighed despondently. He *did* wish people would finish one topic satisfactorily before they started on another.

'I must speak to Charles,' he said, little knowing that the mind of Charles was already made up. Over his luncheon, eaten extensively, he had pronounced eternal warfare upon George Andrews. He nourished the deepest loathing and contempt

for George Andrews. He was a Bastille aristocrat, a backwoodsman, and a die-hard, and he only hungered for the moment when nothing should stand between his boot and George Andrews.

‘My son,’ continued Mr. Humphries, ‘will be in touch with his London office at Warrenders. It is a great opening for your boy, Sir Daniel. That is unless you object on moral grounds to the speculative enterprises of big finance.’

Sir Daniel assured him with heartfelt words that he had no objection—none whatever. He ridiculed the idea. He said he could not imagine how any father could look at the matter in such a Puritanical light.

‘You hear that, George Andrews?’ remarked Mr. Humphries, with a note of triumph.

George Andrews had heard. Throughout a discussion so personal as to embarrass an ordinary man he had paid the keenest attention, maintaining an attitude at once restrained and edifying. He did not reply hurriedly. He ran a chubby hand across his splendid brow. Then he made a brief memorandum and stared with deepening interest at Sir Daniel, who instantly plunged into an indiscretion.

‘I want you,’ he said at random, ‘I want you both to accompany me to the Head’s for tea. He usually has a bit of a crowd the day before term.’

'Thank you, Sir Daniel,' replied George Andrews, making a note of it, and handing a carbon copy to his father, 'and this evening perhaps you will dine with us. I will arrange——'

'George Andrews,' broke in Mr. Humphries, 'is this wise? Before term? I know Sir Daniel will be satisfied with the lightest repast. Besides I have already mentioned the matter.'

'I will take your views into consideration, father,' said George Andrews; 'but I'm afraid I must be allowed to use my own discretion.'

Mr. Humphries made a last appeal.

'Recall what the specialist said,' he pleaded, while Sir Daniel averted his head with perfect taste.

'This is an occasion,' argued George Andrews doggedly.

'So was the last,' replied his parent, with feeling.

At that moment the corridor door opened and Charles Lucifer, gorged but aloof, returned.

'Here we are, Charles,' remarked Sir Daniel with an effort at playfulness. 'You have enjoyed yourself, I trust.'

'It wasn't bad,' admitted Charles cautiously.

'While you were away, Mr. Humphries and I have had a little chat. About you and George Andrews here.'

Charles Lucifer started and stared without affection at his father.

‘ We have been laying our heads together. Isn’t that so, Mr. Humphries ? ’

‘ Forming a limited company, eh ? ’ returned Mr. Humphries, a little jest Sir Daniel considered remarkably happy. Then meeting the scandalised eye of Charles Lucifer, he turned hastily towards the window.

‘ Here we are,’ he cried noisily. ‘ Porter ! hi ! porter ! ’

There were moments when Charles Lucifer, like all decent boys, was heartily ashamed of his father.

CHAPTER II

I

FRANCIS HENNIKER, headmaster of Warrenders, was of that choice band whose biographies, compiled from copious diaries and letters, written in moods alternately pensive and serene, are a comfort and consolation to their publisher. They make his arduous and misunderstood profession worth while.

Francis Henniker was born to be headmaster of Warrenders. From those early days when he gambolled in the presence of his father, the great Bishop Henniker and his coterie of eminent persons, all doors leading to normal existence were barred. He was an only son, which means a lot in these matters. Then his mother preferred to follow the Old Testament Lesson in the Hebrew. That, too, was not without significance. Francis Henniker, in brief, had it early, and he had it strong. From the age of three he made a bee-line for Warrenders and never swerved. He took the course without a check. Prizes, scholarships, bursaries, fellowships, the long jump, the Presidency of the Union, the Chess Championship,

and Holy Orders—all these activities were enveloped and absorbed. He took the Mathematical Tripos, the Classical Tripos, and the Theological Tripos in a bunch, and confessed that he had tossed off a threnody in Russian as a stop-gap. In those days there was no degree in Gaelic, so he left that out.

Now it may be hoped by the envious or obscure that Francis Henniker was diminutive, spectacled, and with a cleft palate. Not a bit of it. He was tall, with a restrained figure, and the fine 'Oxford Movement' Henniker profile. His hair was submitting to silver above the temples, but carefully trimmed, intact, and just as it should be.

More than that. His family life was nearly perfect. His wife, Margaret, was a daughter of the late Mr. David Pendlebury, the eminent statesman. She had inherited a nose revered wherever the British flag is flown. No patriot could look upon Mrs. Henniker's profile without emotion. She was in herself greatly gifted, the author of that stride in philosophical thought, *The Metaphysical Hypothesis in Kantian Criticism*, and was at that very moment engaged upon the fourth and last volume of the complete parliamentary career, life, and remains of her father, the great Mr. Pendlebury.

The Henniker circle was so nearly perfect. The

daily round moved midway between distinguished labour dutifully performed and cultured leisure intellectually disposed. They showed what Life could be. They might have gone down in social history as the perfect home. Unfortunately there was Daphne. As an only child she might have meant so much. There was no reason why she shouldn't; there were so many reasons why she should. But Daphne took after her Aunt Babette (whom all the Hennikers deplored). She persisted, that is to say, in inheriting and adopting all the unenviable dispositions and traits of a woman in whom Francis Henniker struggled to discover some purpose or meaning. Aunt Babette was not well off; she was unmarried, she hunted, and she made jokes—she had what people call a sense of fun. Neither Francis nor Margaret Henniker cared for any of these things. But so long as Babette kept herself amongst her questionable friends nothing would be said, though it was a pity some people could not bear in mind the name they bore. For Babette was also a daughter of the great Mr. Pendlebury, and the sister of Margaret. Her imitations of them, singly and together, made abundantly clear to any person of good taste (and a reverence for Mr. Pendlebury) the tragic and perplexed expression that sometimes overshadowed the face of Margaret Henniker.

It was acknowledged and accepted that Babette was a mistake. Her father had often regretted Babette. In youth her sister prayed every night that she would receive guidance—prayed aloud so that Babette could know how much she meant to them all. At those solemn moments Babette did shadow dances on the wall. Once she even placed a paper mitre on Margaret's devoted head. It was, of course, bravado, but it wounded them all very much.

But such unhappy episodes were, of course, all ancient history, and would only be delicately touched upon in the colossal volume treating of the incomings and outgoings of the great Pendlebury, whom so many people say was born before his hour, and so many other people declare didn't die any too soon.

The tragic point was Daphne. She took after her Aunt Babette. Ever since she was a little girl with curly chestnut hair and violet eyes they had suspected it. Year by year the awful reincarnation went on. Babette had been given another lease of life. They could hear, unmistakably, in the thoughtless, golden laughter of Daphne, the gruesome echo of Babette proclaiming some fresh error of taste or propriety.

Francis Henniker never complained. He never pointed out the significant fact that Babette was a

Pendlebury, not a Henniker. He was a perfect gentleman, a Christian knight. But Daphne saddened him. He even went so far, in moments of depression, as to wonder whether he ought to permit himself to be thankful there was what domestic advertisements refer to as 'one in family.' When overtaken by such a piercing reflection it was his habit to seek refuge in his diary. Long afterwards the public cried over many passages in that diary, and wondered whether Daphne cared. There is no evidence either way.

II

UPON that afternoon it was with some misgiving that Dr. Henniker heard Canon Dugmore announced. He had very good reasons for believing that the Canon would prove very difficult. He sympathised with Dugmore, he liked him, he appreciated his qualities, but he regretted his family.

The Canon, like all fathers of almost imbecile children, was renowned for his prodigious and glowing attainments. Warrenders was proud of him. It was the young Dugmores who spoilt everything. There was Tom, the eldest. Canon Dugmore, being a man who detested secrecy, had

often remarked at dinner at his own house, or in the houses even of comparative strangers, in the park, and in his club, in public and in private, that his son Tom, his eldest son, was the most complete fool about. He stated it as a plain, deliberate fact, and if any person was prepared to argue, or flout him, or interfere in any way, he would welcome the opportunity to prove to the satisfaction of the most obstinate that 'his son Tom' (he shouted these sacred words like three notes of a cornet) was more foolish and sparsely endowed with intelligence than the son of any other gentleman present. Frequently Tom heard him say so.

Canon Dugmore marched quickly into the room. He rejoiced in a chance to expose his domestic tribulations. He would wax exceedingly humorous over them. For he had suffered that day, body and soul. His son Tom, confronted by the 'Little Go,' for which Warrenders had doubtless prepared him for five years, had failed again, but failed to a larger and more decisive extent than upon his last experience of the same examination, when he had, as it were, merely knocked off the top of the wall, a blunder any young leaper might outlive. This time he had not risen at all—he had simply charged gamely through in the fine old Dugmore spirit, scattering bricks right and left.

The Canon was aching to tell Dr. Henniker.

Then Mrs. Dugmore had broken the news to him that Marjorie, their fourth girl, a pretty creature, had got engaged to a curate, who, although very certain and grave about the after-life, was quite casual about the intervening pilgrimage—a spirit Canon Dugmore loathed, detested, and would have none of. The curate had not even expectations, but possessed instead an abundance of sandy hair, a pair of hilarious and watery blue eyes, a fox-terrier that was something else as well (something with a bushy tail), and a dissenting, but dependent, father.

‘There is,’ Canon Dugmore had remarked bitterly to his wife, as he pulled furiously at Dr. Henniker’s door-bell, ‘there is, I suppose, no more unsuitable, unpromising, or unprepossessing fellow than Sweeting in the Church—none.’ At which Mrs. Dugmore, who had been so active in rounding up the eldest son of Sir John Plum, that she had pounced upon the horrible intrigue about an hour too late, nodded, and recalled the drooping figure of Marjorie (who was delighted with Sweeting, his dog, and his dissenting parent) without love or admiration.

Impossible though it may seem, there was a third no less rancorous tribulation lying heavy upon Canon Dugmore. He was in the very heart of an extremely tedious and provoking controversy in

the Press. It had started quite amicably over a question of sweet-pea culture, regarding which the Canon was, together with Early Church history, Brazilian butterflies, Greek accents, and Toby jugs, an acknowledged and enthusiastic authority. Mr. Sparrow, a Baptist minister, having differed from the Canon, was called by him, in a moment of hilarity, 'a dissenter from the orthodox view.' This, Mr. Sparrow, after consultation with his solicitor, took to mean something deeper than Canon Dugmore intended to convey, and there was no mistaking the controversial note in his reply which, in its maintenance that he presumed even the flowers of Heaven must needs have sprung from an Apostolical Succession to satisfy a Canon of the Church, rang like a slogan throughout the soul of Nonconformity. Thus Mr. Sparrow, who was in imminent peril of being badly worsted over a technical point in the culture of peas, secured a signal triumph by drawing attention to the Rome-ward tendency of Anglicanism.

It was, therefore, with the sullen satisfaction of a man buffeted both in domestic life and in the market-place that Canon Dugmore grasped the reluctant hand of Dr. Henniker, who, looking into the Canon's jaundiced eye, knew the worst. For a moment he meditated flight in the direction of the Bishop of Basingstoke, whose only son was so

credible. But he knew the Canon would track him down. He cast a look full of suggestion at his wife; her face was clouded with introspection. Then, the position being critical, he called to Daphne. He would, of course, have been the last to admit the necessity for such a course. It would have shocked him exceedingly had any person said he sent out an S.O.S. call for Daphne whenever the weather broke.

'Come, Daphne,' said her father cordially, 'you know Canon Dugmore, don't you?' The moment had come. Dr. Henniker leaped for the shore. 'Ah! there's Justice Venables,' he cried, 'excuse me, Dugmore,' and was gone, never to return.

The Canon fell into a morose and determined silence. He followed Dr. Henniker's tall figure with a patient, resentful gaze. He put 'his son Tom,' Marjorie, and Mr. Sparrow into temporary dry dock.

'Let's have tea,' said Daphne. 'I'm sure you must be tired after showing your boy over all your old haunts.'

That was a stock remark of Daphne's. Usually it went down extremely well. It enabled a father to recall, with the pertinacity of middle age, a great number of quite creditable exploits. It allowed Daphne time for watching the people, and eating a hearty tea.

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To her amazement the Canon uttered one harsh and scornful laugh, and thrusting a jam sandwich into his mouth chewed it savagely. She was aware that she had blundered. It grieved her. It was Daphne's recreation and pride to manage all difficult persons; to smooth the way for all nervous but determined proposers; to satisfy all dismissed servants that they were quite in the wrong in imagining they had been given notice; to relieve this weakness or that with the scope and assurance of a patent medicine. Sometimes Daphne went further than Dr. Henniker thought desirable or proper. Mrs. Henniker, mindful of Babette, voiced the same opinion. On the other hand, Daphne was confident she did not go far enough.

Turning upon the Canon, she renounced all thought of an ice. He had fallen back upon the offensive silence of an idol in a solitary place. From across the room the eyes of Mrs. Dugmore, who did not require the gift of telepathy to read her husband's mind, rested pensively upon them both. She was standing by Mrs. Henniker, so she was spared the fret and turmoil of conversation.

'We were talking about you the other day,' said Daphne, in no spirit of truth.

The Canon flickered an eyelid, but, beyond that, preserved and even accentuated an air of vigilance and passivity.

'I forget who said you should write your reminiscences. I think,' she added, turning over one or two vague but promising persons as the Prime Minister might winnow the candidates for Birthday Honours, 'I think it must have been the Master of St. Agatha's—a charming man.' Now the Master of St. Agatha's should have been a misfire. He wasn't distinguished and, even to strangers, concealed all charm. It was the Master of St. Bartholomew Daphne meant—whose asides are nearly as famous as those of Justice Venables. She should have suffered a defeat. Instead she hit a winner.

The Canon softened.

'Now, that's *most* extraordinary,' he said. 'I couldn't have believed it. Of course you know Professor Cocoon is *the* authority on Brazilian entomology?'

Daphne smiled sympathetically. When in doubt she fell back on her understanding smile. It meant so much more than mere words.

'It only shows,' pursued Canon Dugmore, 'how purged of all animosity a great scholar's mind may become. I wrote a rather sharp criticism last week, a signed criticism, upon his latest book which is creating such a stir just now.' At those grave words the Canon paused and glanced solemnly round as though the crisis in Brazilian butterflies

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haunted every face present. 'I sent it to Professor Cocoon with a little note. He did not acknowledge either.' Again the gloom settled down upon his brow, and, availing himself of a neighbouring plate of muffins, he passed beyond the brink of speech.

'I am sure,' said Daphne, more truthfully than she could have hoped, 'he has not forgotten the article. It would be unlike Professor Cocoon. I'm more and more certain it was his idea that you should write your reminiscences. We all agreed you had known so many well-known people and your interests are so wide, aren't they?'

Strive as he might Canon Dugmore could not deny it.

'We were reading in Lord Strathgleg's *All About Nothing*—such a successful book—that once in a conversation with the late Queen——'

'Yes,' said the Canon quickening.

'That once when you were telling the Prime Minister one of your wonderful stories——'

'Yes,' repeated the Canon, raising a guarded, but not hostile, eye.

'It tickled him enormously—one about a Highland shepherd—who——'

'I know, I know,' broke out the Canon, with a convulsion of cheek muscles.

Daphne was quite carried away by the anecdote.

It was such a homely little thing, and taking colour every minute.

'The Queen, who was standing near, commanded you to repeat the tale——'

'Oh, oh,' chuckled Canon Dugmore.

'At first you refused point blank——'

The Canon was positive he had never refused the Queen anything. He denied it *emphatically*. He protested, happy and gratified smiles chasing each other over his plump cheeks and twinkling in his light blue eyes. He shook his head with mock indignation at Daphne. He accepted an ice and suddenly, with winning jocosity, cried: 'Let us EACH have an ice, Miss Henniker!'

'But the Queen was obdurate,' persisted Daphne. 'She remarked, rather stiffly: "If you remain silent, Canon Dugmore——"'

'I was Mister then,' he corrected, including several neighbouring persons in what, to a Dugmore, was nothing short of a sunny childless smile.

'“I will regard it,”’ went on Daphne sternly, and not looking at all like the late Queen Victoria, “I will regard it as an act of treason, and either commit you to my dungeons or make you Archbishop.”’

'Come, come, my dear young lady—Archbishop! oh, for shame!—let it remain as Bishop.'

He accepted a piece of cherry-cake in a happy reverie.

‘The Queen,’ said Daphne dreamily, ‘whispered to Lord Strathgleg that to make sure of hearing all your stories she would——’

It was never known what that misused personage would have done. It is uncertain whether Daphne had made up her own mind. For the Canon refused to hear any more, or refused at any rate to let such gross things be spoken in a corner.

‘Henniker!’ he shouted, so loudly that Mrs. Henniker faltered for an instant and as quickly recovered, ‘Henniker, I appeal to you. This daughter of yours is raking up my awful past in the most disgraceful way. It’s too bad. Why, she actually says——’

Falling short of Dr. Henniker he related to a group of sympathetic persons the whole ridiculous business, pointing out where it was absolutely false—as, for instance, that the Queen mentioned dungeons. In his acquaintance with Her Majesty he had never heard her use the word—never.

But Daphne drooped a little. She realised, now that the Canon had taken wing, that she was only warming up.

CHAPTER III

I

THE room was pretty full when Sir Daniel Springburn shook Dr. Henniker by the hand, and turning, said, in a confidential tone: 'May I introduce you—Mr. Hubert Humphries. And his son,' he added, and made a comprehensive gesture towards George Andrews. Dr. Henniker presented a gracious hand, then, turning, confronted them with his wife. She, too, shook hands, continuing instantly, in a resounding contralto, one or two personal reflections to the Bishop of Basingstoke beside her.

Dr. Henniker addressed a few smiling words to Sir Daniel, withdrew a step, then advanced upon the open doorway to receive another guest.

'When I dictate the last paragraph,' remarked Mrs. Henniker, in her carrying voice, 'I make it symbolic of the spirit of the preceding chapter. I endeavour to fill in the background with a sympathetic and suggestive horizon—at times sombre, even melancholy, at others serene and with a note of hope——'

'There is a notable example, in fact a classical instance——' began the Bishop, in his high, penetrating note.

'And not infrequently,' went on the commanding voice of Mrs. Henniker, 'when the final words have passed into type, I am overtaken by a mood of despondency—inherited, I have no doubt, from my maternal grandmother, a Macintosh from Loch Drearie. I do not utter a syllable for hours.'

'The classical instance that came into my mind,' asserted the Bishop, heartened by her concluding words, 'occurs in Ovid——'

'At other times,' resumed Mrs. Henniker, 'I go on and on, hardly pausing for breath. Anecdotes that might appear trivial in the careers of lesser men serve to illuminate an aspect, a contour, as it were, of Mr. Pendlebury's portrait, to make the great public who knew him say instinctively: "That is the kind of man he was——"'

'I once had the honour of advising David Pendlebury on a matter of business,' said a clear juvenile voice. 'Are you an admirer of his, madam?'

Mrs. Henniker stared about her. She looked up; then she looked down. The Bishop started violently, and throughout that room there crept an intense, even aching, silence.

'And who,' said Mrs. Henniker at last, 'is this little boy?'

'Allow me to introduce myself. Here is my father, Hubert Humphries. I am George Andrews Humphries. The occasion to which I alluded was, of course, confidential at the time. It was—to be exact—during the international crisis three years ago. To-day, when the tide of popular favour has turned against Mr. Pendlebury, I still adhere to my conviction that, although not greatly gifted as a constructive statesman——'

'Come and have an ice,' implored a persuasive voice in the ear of George Andrews.

He broke off and looked up into the sympathetic violet eyes of Daphne Henniker. As he looked, greatly taken aback, she made a graphic grimace, and pinched his arm. At the same moment Sir Daniel stood on his foot—hard, and the Bishop, a true Christian though ritualistic, referred to the weather. Before he knew what had happened George Andrews was hustled away, while behind him, beneath the stricken eye of Mrs. Henniker, every man of good manners was talking about every subject absolutely removed from the eminent Mr. Pendlebury.

'You have gone and done it now, young man,' said Daphne. 'How could you talk like that of grandfather?'

'I never regarded David Pendlebury in that light,' answered George Andrews. 'I merely remarked that he had the defects of his temperament. . . . I'm sorry. I must explain to your mother.'

'No,' she said hurriedly; 'much better not. Just eat your ice.'

George Andrews took another. He stared thoughtfully at Daphne.

'I suppose you're a new boy,' she asked.

He flushed at the crude way she put it.

'I have come to Warrenders,' he admitted, 'but I have taken the step for definite reasons.'

To his annoyance she went off into foolish laughter.

'You *are* funny,' she giggled; 'but you must be careful. Which house are you going to?'

'Mr. Denver's. Is that humorous, too?'

She looked with deepening interest at him.

'I *do* hope they won't sit on you.'

'Sit on me! Do you mean physically?'

Into the room the new arrivals were streaming, the prosperous parentage of Warrenders. In a far corner Hubert Humphries had button-holed Dr. Henniker, and had already attracted the casual attention of several parents. Many fathers—particularly gentlemen interested in the City—were staring, first at George Andrews, then at

Hubert Henry, with a far-away, thoughtful look in their simple eyes.

Daphne Henniker was considerably alarmed about George Andrews' future. She was a kind girl, a sportsman, and a rebel. She felt sorry for George Andrews. She admired the way he gagged; but she was not by any means sure Mr. Denver would be amused. If he handled George Andrews in the traditional spirit of such problems trouble would ensue.

'Come outside,' she whispered. 'Bring another ice. Come quickly. Don't let the dark man over there see us, or that fat little man looking this way.'

They waited their opportunity and stole out. For at least five minutes the dark man ate cake impulsively and the fat man dreamed fatuous dreams.

Under the trees there was a cool bank upon which they sat. From the open windows of the drawing-room they could hear the sullen buzzing of conversation, the tinkle of cups, and at intervals the clerical voice of Blinkthorn, the butler, fluting 'Mr. Wase-Attlee,' or 'Sir John and Lady Birkin,' and so on.

'Look here,' said Daphne, 'I think I can give you a tip or two.'

George Andrews suppressed a natural desire to

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smile. What a sweet, innocent young creature she was.

'Go on,' he said mildly.

'First of all, behave like an ordinary boy.'

'But I'm not.'

'Never mind—you've got an Eton collar.'

'That's no proof of anything. Remember Mr. Pendlebury's collars?'

'It is here. If you pull their legs they'll kick.'

George Andrews grew restive.

'Nobody is talking of pulling people's legs,' he said irritably. 'I've come here to study public school conditions; also, at my father's wish, to mark time for a year or two. If I think the system efficient, I'll back it. If not, I'll—I'll probably smash it. But I'm not a humorist—I'm a man of business.'

Daphne sighed. He was at it again.

'In Denver's,' she resumed, 'there is a master called Mr. Sheringham. He takes the Lower Third. He is a friend of mine.' She paused abruptly, then went on with a rush: 'I'll send him a line to look after you. He'll make things easier.'

'Thank you,' responded George Andrews, who was often worried with introductions of this nature. 'I'll do what I can for this gentleman, especially as he is a friend of yours.' He felt, however, in

no way drawn to Mr. Sheringham, and wearied of the personal tone their conversation had taken.

'People are coming,' she said. 'I knew they would. There's the dark one, Andrew Scoular—I'm afraid he's seen us.'

'Is he a friend of yours?' asked George Andrews.

Daphne bit her lip.

'He'd like to be.'

'So would I,' said George Andrews bluntly.

Before she could reply a tall man in the late thirties hastened up. Behind him another youngish man was putting on a secretive spurt. Mr. Scoular displayed the greatest surprise at coming upon them like that.

'I was hoping to see you, Miss Henniker,' he said tenderly, and taking no notice whatever of George Andrews.

The other gentleman with muttered oaths withdrew, and slunk about the neighbouring foliage.

'Let me introduce you,' began Daphne.

'How-d'yer-do,' broke in Mr. Scoular, without awaiting particulars.

George Andrews arose with dignity.

'Perhaps,' he said, turning his profile towards the intruder, 'perhaps, Miss Henniker, I may have the pleasure of entertaining you at dinner to-night at the Lion. At eight.'

'Rather,' agreed Daphne, then turning to Mr. Scoular added, in a reconciled note: 'Shall we go to the hammock?' She knew he preferred to propose at the hammock, and she was the soul of consideration in these little amenities.

Turning away, George Andrews was surprised to see several pompous and important figures emerging from the drawing-room. They did so with an air of casual and even jaunty spontaneity, just as though the temperature inside had risen with a bound. But Sir Daniel knew better. He had seen the group surrounding Mr. Humphries display a touching anxiety to become acquainted with Mr. Humphries' son. He had viewed with detestation and disgust the more venturesome setting out, with every indication of innocent intention, in the pursuit of George Andrews. The overwhelming desire for the cool autumnal sunshine, the stampede from the refreshment table, made Dr. Henniker ponder. He was frankly concerned when he saw the Bishop trot deliberately over a flower-bed and disappear in the evergreens.

George Andrews, meditating upon the contemptible Scoular, saw yet another youngish man haunting the outer regions of the lawn, and was suddenly confronted by the Bishop. His lordship was breathless, as he might well be, considering he

had only beaten an American gentleman by a short head.

'Isn't it quite beautiful,' he panted, mopping his brow. 'Now I wonder where we could have a little friendly chat. I'm not averse to a little quiet chat,' he added, shooting a hungry glance at George Andrews.

'Certainly I——'

'You see,' pursued the Bishop, just as the American burst through a border of dahlias, 'you see, I have boys of my own. They are not actually in your House, but I want you all to be friends. Your dear father has expressed a natural, a very proper, anxiety that you should be surrounded by the best influences of public school life. Dear me, who is this gentleman?'

'Pardon me, sir,' broke in a determined, if exhausted, bass, 'but I take it you have not forgotten the name of Joe B. Tupper of Chicago? I thought not.' Switching round on the Bishop, who evinced only the mildest excitement, he added, with a rueful laugh: 'Why, you might think after all I've suffered at the hands of G. A. Humphries I'd bank a grievance. Do I, sir? Would that be business? It would not. I've gotta heap to learn from G. A. H. I hear,' resumed Mr. Tupper, 'that you contemplate schooling here. Well, I can't tell you how interested I am. I've

brought my son Bim across for that vurry purpose. I'm more sorry than I can say that, at the moment, Bim is with Mrs. Tupper. I don't know whether you met Mrs. Tupper in Chicago, but I can't tell you what a vurry real pleasure it would be for her to make your acquaintance. And as for Bim, why——'

Sir Daniel moved resolutely between them. 'I think, sir,' he said with an angry smile, 'it will be much kinder to allow Humphries to settle down quietly in his own House. My son, Charles Lucifer, is prepared to give him every assistance, and I myself will see Mr. Denver.'

'Not at all, sir,' remarked the Bishop sharply, 'I was begged by Mr. Humphries himself. I gave my word, sir,' he added, with the determined air of a Cromwellian.

'If I may just say one thing,' remarked Mr. Tupper, 'as an old friend and admirer of G. A. Humphries' peculiar genius, I am sure that he will prefer a certain amount of freedom.'

'Nonsense!' snorted the Bishop.

'Impossible!' said Sir Daniel, 'quite impossible.'

In the empty drawing-room Dr. Henniker tore himself from Mr. Humphries. He found his wife gazing with much resentment over several ladies

at the gesticulating head of the Bishop of Basingstoke.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘where is Daphne?’

‘In the garden, Francis.’

‘I feared so,’ murmured the sorely-tried Dr. Henniker. ‘Dear me, what are they all laughing about there?’

At the end of the lawn clustered an excited knot of fathers.

‘They are not laughing, Francis.’

‘Then it is politics,’ he replied, and, flashing a smile at the circle of deserted ladies, hastened down the lawn. That dreadful boy, Humphries, was saying a few words which he could not catch. But whatever they were they appeared to cause deep gratification to the audience. It was all very puzzling. At that moment, under the wistful gaze of the fathers, George Andrews walked slowly up the lawn, his hands in his knickerbocker pockets and his large distinguished head lowered thoughtfully. Mrs. Henniker had seen him coming. She remained standing in the open window, looking far over his diminutive person. He stared upwards at her for a moment, being greatly reminded of his historic interview with the great Mr. Pendlebury, then squeezing past her, joined his father and withdrew. Out in the garden Dr. Henniker, full of misgiving, swept onwards through the

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shrubberies, and suddenly stopped dead. Upon the other side of a rhododendron bush Mr. Dugdale, a widower and a K.C., hatless, with one trouser-leg ricked up, and the air of a faithful retriever, was standing beside Daphne.

And, as he wondered what course a father should take, he caught the words: 'Shall we go to the hammock?' (which delighted Mr. Dugdale, who was a novice) and made a prudent retreat.

II

DR. HENNIKER waited up for Daphne. It was an hour since his wife had walked, with Pendlebury grandeur, from the room. She had said her say and departed. Doubtless she would compose her mind for slumber. Not so Dr. Henniker. He had been too deeply stirred. He walked up and down the study, a tragic figure, waiting with increasing dissatisfaction for Daphne. He preferred, since it was unavoidable, to deal immediately with a subject painful to both, so that they should not sleep on it unspoken. Not, of course, that Dr. Henniker would close an eye.

It was eleven when the latch-key clicked in the lock. The front door opened and closed, a light footstep tripped across the hall and paused before

the study door. Dr. Henniker stood in front of the fire. He adopted the traditional pose of the outraged English father—the best type of father. He was prepared to be just. He refused to be angry and melodramatic.

‘Not gone to bed,’ cried Daphne, popping her golden head around the door.

Dr. Henniker admitted that he had not gone to bed.

‘But it’s eleven,’ she expostulated. Her father was not surprised to hear it. He requested her to close the door. At these words Daphne knew where she stood. In ordinary circumstances any person entering a warm room upon an early autumn night performs such an action without stage direction: in moments of domestic crisis an intimation of such a character is an ultimatum. It spells a nasty scene.

Daphne shut the door.

‘Might I ask,’ he said, with the absolute courtesy of a parent out for trouble, ‘where you have been this evening?’

Daphne struggled with a giggle.

‘At the Lion,’ she answered, and added ‘at dinner’ hurriedly, to spare him a vision of the public bar.

‘At the Lion,’ repeated Dr. Henniker, and looked poignant.

'I left a note in the hall, didn't you see it?'

Her father regarded her with mournful gaze.

'I could only imagine that it was a foolish jest. Could you, for example, picture your mother dining at the Lion?'

No; Daphne couldn't.

Dr. Henniker, satisfied that the outer ramparts of the position were scaled, ventured further. 'When I add that I cannot contemplate without alarm the impression that your presence at such a place must have created, I speak not as head-master of Warrenders—I do not lay any personal weight on the disgrace that naturally attaches to my name and the name of your mother—I am thinking only of your own welfare. I do not believe you realise how your conduct wounds us, Daphne. Which calls to my mind another matter. I had been upon the point of speaking to you about your behaviour with Mr. Dugdale. He has left unexpectedly for town to-night. He said nothing, but I hope I am not unjust in assuming——' he dropped into an eloquent silence. 'I know you are young, Daphne, but have you forgotten Mr. Stokes and that poor boy Rogers?'

'I cannot help it,' she replied. 'I cannot prevent them proposing, if they want. Vernon Rogers did it during a foursome at tennis. I had never thought it possible.'

'I am sure,' retorted Dr. Henniker, 'your mother never placed herself in such a position.'

'But Aunt Babette did—heaps of times.'

'Never mind your Aunt Babette. The least said of your Aunt Babette the better. But when I think of an eminent and coming man like Mr. Dugdale I admit I am ashamed. That any guest should return home so disheartened is a slight upon this house.'

'But I can't accept them all, just because they come for the week-end, father.'

'No, Daphne; you misconstrue my words. But you can, at least, prevent any recurrence of this kind of thing. And now perhaps you will inform me with whom you took dinner at the Lion. Do not be afraid—speak the truth.'

Daphne lowered her head. Her father steeled himself for the worst.

'Well?'

'With George Andrews.'

'I beg your pardon.'

'With the Humphries boy.'

Dr. Henniker saw no light. Out of the unknown darkness had emerged. He was staggered.

'Here is the menu. It was great fun, only George Andrews ate too much. He told me he was afraid he would. The ice pudding—'

'Does it not strike you as rather extraordinary

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procedure for the headmaster's daughter to dine at the expense of a new boy, especially after the incident this afternoon?'

'I said as much to the Bishop.'

'The Bishop?'

'He took me in. On the other side was Sir Roderick Blythe, the specialist. Justice Venables sat opposite, and Canon Dugmore said grace.'

Dr. Henniker sat heavily down. He stared with vacant eyes at the menu. 'Glacés George Andrews'; he read it again and again. But when he reached 'Champignons à la Basingstoke' his iron nerve failed him. He went up in years.

'There were heaps of men,' continued Daphne briskly, 'and I was the only woman there. After dinner he made a splendid speech upon the future of commercial education in our public schools.'

'Who?' inquired Dr. Henniker huskily, 'the Bishop?'

Daphne was at the door. She blew him a good-night kiss.

'No; George Andrews,' she replied.

CHAPTER IV

I

SIR Daniel Springburn pressed his son, Charles Lucifer, to an egg. He said he trusted it was a fresh egg; if not, they would order another—at *once*. He filled Charles's tea-cup until it overflowed into his saucer and, in course of time, dribbled upon his trousers. He behaved, in short, throughout an admirable breakfast, in a fashion so hectic as to make his son thoroughly on edge.

'Things are very different nowadays,' said Sir Daniel, with a reminiscent smile, and added, in a lower tone, 'very different.'

So far as Charles was concerned they might have remained so. Sir Daniel elaborated the point.

'It was in this very room,' he remarked, 'in this identical room that your grandfather and I took breakfast when I came to Warrenders over thirty years ago. Long time ago, Charles. Very different. Quite haphazard. I don't say they had no sense of responsibility, but things were slacker. To-day even at a public school it is important to

think ahead. The great fault of the system is that it cannot look ahead. Are you listening, Charles?'

'Yes.'

'I don't remember my father ever giving me a word of sound counsel,' pursued Sir Daniel, solemnly. 'I don't blame him, mind you. He was not that sort. He had no need to think about ways and means. I don't say a boy shouldn't make his own friends. It didn't matter then. But were I in your shoes, Charles, how I'd jump at the chance. I'd take to heart any advice that anyone older or more experienced offered me. Don't think I'm preaching. It's because I'm anxious about you. And some day you will realise how much a son may—may, in fact, mean to his father.'

Sir Daniel lit a cigar deliberately, staring very hard over the coffee-pot. Charles listened dully. He had an idea that this kind of disjointed dialogue was inevitable. A kind of creed that must be chanted by all fathers who supported Church and State.

'One is so apt to forget,' resumed Sir Daniel pensively, 'that opportunities in life sometimes pass never to return. I recollect when I was at Warrenders I was next cubicle to a boy called Bourne. I had a foolish, a ridiculous prejudice against him because he never washed. It turned out later he suffered from a tendency to chills.

Think what I lost through inexperience? I need not remind you that he is to-day Chancellor of the Exchequer.' Overcome by this melancholy reflection, Sir Daniel knocked the ash from the end of his cigar, as a man shrugs his shoulders.

'There was a chap called Bourne at Wheeler's last term, but he won the swimming race. It'd be jolly funny if he was the same family, wouldn't it?'

'Very,' agreed Sir Daniel absently, and he began again: 'Why do I impress this upon you, Charles? The reason is so obvious that you cannot fail——'

'I don't know,' said Charles honestly.

Sir Daniel, flung so suddenly upon what was exceedingly vivid in his own mind, grew a dull red, and was suddenly greatly relieved to recall the familiar response for all parents *in extremis*.

'Simply for your good, my boy,' he said, and hastened to support the statement. 'Yesterday,' he remarked casually, 'in the train you may remember the Humphries. Please don't interrupt. I admit I was prejudiced against them at first. But later, when you were at luncheon, I was charmed, quite charmed. Mr. Humphries may not be a man of social standing; he may not have had our advantages, Charles, but he is a man anyone would be glad to know. The more I have seen of Mr. Humphries and his son, the more have I

been impressed. I have spoken to them of you, I have told them that you know no one at Warrenders, and they were delightful—quite delightful.'

'That little beast,' broke in Charles hotly.

'He is,' said Sir Daniel with austerity, 'a clever and promising boy, and when I add that I do not remember ever being so interested by anyone of his age, I hope you will be less vulgar in your language.'

'He's a bounder,' said Charles helplessly.

'I absolutely deny it. I won't listen to such nonsense. I want you to be guided by me.'

'Aunt Caroline would loathe him on sight.'

Sir Daniel blenched before that awful truth.

'I promised aunt last thing I'd make decent friends.'

'Damn!' said Sir Daniel silently.

'They'll all cut Humphries on sight.'

'Don't keep saying "on sight" every second word,' snapped his father petulantly.

'It's true, anyway.'

'It's not true—it's absolute rubbish.'

'You said yourself the night before last——'

'My dear boy,' thrust in Sir Daniel, 'I am not here to argue with you about what I said or did not say. Your aunt will be guided by me,' and after that monstrous falsehood veiled his face in

a cloud of smoke. 'To you, in your inexperience, people are either common or not common. When you are as old as I am you will be more temperate, less hasty to judge a man by—by—— What was I saying, Charles? Oh yes; you will not shut your eyes to other considerations. I hope you agree, my boy.'

But Charles glared sullenly at the dregs in his cup. He had decided, no less than ten minutes ago, that his aunt, who had guided with an iron hand the household of Springburn since the decease of her sister Evelyn, should be informed of the whole business.

'I see you do,' remarked Sir Daniel, who was no psychologist. 'I knew you would. I want to say good-bye to-day with the knowledge that very soon you and George Andrews—what a jolly name—will be in each other's company all the time. In fact,' he added, with a belated chuckle, 'I have a little idea that you might write me whenever you can, Charles, saying what George Andrews is busied about.'

'Busied about,' echoed Charles blankly.

'As a rag,' persisted his father, laughing noisily at the very idea. 'You don't know how seriously he takes himself. Why, he actually studies the markets. I can't tell you how tickled I'd be to hear what conclusions he comes to. Besides,' per-

suated Sir Daniel, with a sudden drop to great earnestness, 'he cannot be an absolute ignoramus, Charles. He might even be able to give you a rough idea of business.'

To his delight Charles said neither yea nor nay. He was, if the melancholy truth were told, under the impression that his father was making an ass of himself in the presence of the head waiter.

'I am thinking only of you,' lied Sir Daniel, adhering to a proper solemnity, 'and every time you write a letter you will be gaining an insight into commerce. Take it seriously, Charles—you cannot be too punctilious. And whenever you find George Andrews sending telegrams—*why, you send telegrams.*'

'Send what?' asked Charles, roused from apathy and shame.

'Telegrams. To me. Nothing could make you more practical. And - for - every - telegram - you - send - me—' concluded his father, with a pause between each word and upsetting the cream-jug with his arm, 'I will post you a pound. Honour bright!'

Instantly Charles went scarlet, fully aware that Graham, a new boy at Denver's, was with his people at the next table. His indignation and shame had rarely, if ever, risen so high. He raised his eyes, noticed the cream on his father's

sleeve, trembled, and knew he could never again look Graham in the face. And Graham, whose mother had mentioned very audibly his winter drawers, was in no better plight.

Greatly relieved and cheered, Sir Daniel settled the bill, and they set out for Mr. Denver's House. In the street, in close conversation, approached the Bishop of Basingstoke and his son. As they swept past, his lordship was heard distinctly to reiterate : 'There is no more broadening influence for the mind than contact with commercial enterprise.' It struck Sir Daniel as a peculiar, if not improper, thing for any clergyman to say.

During a very satisfactory little chat with Mr. Denver, Sir Daniel made a point of the relief it would be to Mr. Hubert Humphries (who had been most unfortunately recalled to town), if Charles Lucifer and George Andrews could have adjoining cubicles. He remarked that Mr. Denver knew only too well how precious school friendships may become and what a comfort to anxious parents. And Mr. Denver—having supported with deepening bewilderment similar admirable sentiments from Justice Venables, Sir Roderick Blythe, Mr. Tupper, Sir John Birkin, and Canon Dugmore—could do no more than acquiesce.

Sir Daniel, satisfied that forethought and acumen

could plan no further, prepared for departure. He bade Mr. Denver a lingering farewell, threatened laughingly to run up before very long, shut the study door behind him, and beckoned to Withers, the butler. Drawing him aside, he made a point of the relief it would be to Mr. Hubert Humphries if Charles Lucifer and George Andrews could have adjoining cubicles. He added, with a hand deep in his trousers pocket, that arrangements could probably be ensured without troubling Mr. Denver further. And Withers—having received with deepening satisfaction similar marks of esteem from Justice Venables, Sir Roderick Blythe, Mr. Tupper, Sir John Birkin, and Canon Dugmore—could do no more than acquiesce. He only hoped his mind would bear the strain.

II

THE Reverend Henry Denver had forgotten about the fathers. He was enjoying a quiet cup of tea, and reading the *Spectator*. There was a cheerful fire burning, the room was warm, he was a bachelor, and it was the beginning of term. All these things were pleasing to Mr. Denver. He had been a housemaster for twenty years, and yet the beginning of each autumn term was a recurrent

relief and excitement. Holidays were all very well, but, when one is getting on in years, they are apt to become a little relaxing. All his life Mr. Denver had walked in smooth places, and, being an unmarried man, there had been no actual necessity why he should not follow his inclinations, which were towards a life secluded from worry or strain, and untouched by the roar of the outer world. Had Mr. Denver not been at Warrenders he would have emerged with other academic gentlemen to uphold to their last breath the cause for compulsory Greek. Which would have been the passionate moment in his life.

As it was, Mr. Denver had become absorbed in Warrenders. It is needless to say he had been once head of the school. Warrenders, Oxford, Warrenders—there you have Mr. Denver's life. Not a bad life as the world goes, and Mr. Denver, though he did not know the world beyond the limits of his University Club in London and a Greece that ceased to exist after A.D., was content or nearly so. He had no actual reason for discontent. Nothing to do with money, aggravating relatives, digestive troubles, or perplexity regarding the future life. Mr. Denver never gave such problems anything but an orthodox attention—particularly poor relatives, since he had none. He was a successful housemaster, kept an efficient cook, was

valeted by the incomparable Withers, was a keen collector of first editions, and (to prove how human he was) exhibited with marked success pedigree white rabbits.

Sitting before the comfortable fire, Mr. Denver helped himself to a second cup of tea and a tea-cake. Outside the autumn afternoon was closing in, the well-kept garden was haunted by shadows, over the trees the delicate spire of the College chapel was silhouetted against the evening sun. Mr. Denver munched his tea-cake and let the *Spectator* fall from his hand. He felt so completely at ease, body and mind, that he permitted his head to slip back upon the cushion, while he watched the sunset flooding the sky. He wanted to make the most of it. He had a weakness for sunsets. He could, were he in the mood, describe in detail anything from twenty to forty sunsets he had made his own in Oxford, Greece, or Warrenders. They gave him an emotion of exquisite sadness. He was prone to alternate moods of melancholy and hope. He enjoyed both equally, and wrote little pensive essays, under a pseudonym, to let the public share his bounty.

‘I beg your pardon, sir.’

He scrambled up in his chair. The butler, tall, mournful, and enigmatic, was standing by the door.

‘Yes, Withers—what is it?’

'Master Humphries, sir, has arrived. He desired me to say, sir, that he can see you at once.'

But Mr. Denver was not listening. He was feeling deliciously sad. He had forgotten Withers. He would have included George Andrews had it been possible.

'I am happy to meet you.'

Mr. Denver was aware that someone was speaking. He saw a small boy—a new boy—standing about ten feet away. Experience reminded him that this was a very trying moment for new boys. He had written with delicate insight about it all.

'I feel I should express to you my father's regret for returning to town. But business—as I need not remind you—is——'

'Come along,' said Mr. Denver, with the fortunate interruption of a man slightly deaf, 'tell me your name. Don't be frightened now. Humphries, eh? And this is your first appearance? Of course it is?'

This amiable little habit of asking questions and answering them himself obscured George Andrews. He appeared to be just what he looked—an under-sized new boy.

Mr. Denver, crossing over to his desk, bent his tall, invertebrate figure, and, unfolding his spectacles, studied a list of names.

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'Yes, yes, of course,' he murmured, 'I remember now. Stupid of me. So you are Humphries.'

George Andrews, who had approached the fire, warmed his hands a moment, without replying. He was forced to admit that he found something in the situation rather irritating.

'Perhaps,' he said, 'my friend, Sir Daniel Springburn, spoke of me.'

Mr. Denver caught at the last words. He knew at once where he was.

'He did,' he said, and George Andrews nodded and smiled. It was obvious Mr. Denver had heard a word in season. He had. From Justice Venables, Sir Roderick Blythe, Mr. Tupper, Sir John Birkin, and Canon Dugmore.

'You have many good friends interested in you, Humphries,' he said pleasantly, 'particularly Sir Daniel Springburn.'

'Oh, Sir Daniel,' echoed George Andrews, 'he tells me his boy is here—in fact I have already met him.'

'You should be very grateful to these gentlemen, Humphries. They one and all appear to have taken upon themselves a quite unusual interest in your welfare. I gather your father, whom I have not had the pleasure of meeting, begged of them to keep in touch with you; and I am sure Venables, Blythe, Tupper, Birkin, Dugmore, and Springburn

will prove a host in themselves—particularly Springburn.'

George Andrews was not so sure.

'I have also received a letter from your father,' continued Mr. Denver, 'he says you are backward, not strong, I suppose—please do not interrupt, Humphries. Where was I? I gather your education has suffered, and that your father has a very natural desire that we shall push you along. Let me see—ah, here we are. He says you have a very advanced pain——'

'Brain,' corrected George Andrews, who had dictated the letter.

But Mr. Denver did not seem to take it in.

'That must be seen to,' he murmured. 'We must have our glass of warm milk. My house-keeper takes these little comforts in hand. Where is your pain, Humphries? I trust it is not what I have heard described as "a grumbling appendix"—eh? It will not prevent you taking a part in games, will it?'

George Andrews decided to adopt that pain.

'I'm afraid,' he replied deliberately, 'that it will.'

Mr. Denver, who, in the twenties, had written the great cricket song of Warrenders, and played half-back for the 'Varsity, pursed his lips and bit the side of his thumb.

'Denver's,' he said gravely, 'has held the footer cup for two years, Humphries. We are a very keen House. Perhaps you don't know Mr. Sheringham used to play for Cambridge. I have heard it said he was the fastest wing three-quarter since Macintosh. I can just recall Macintosh,' he sighed reminiscently, 'he *must* have been a wonder. We hope to beat Huntingdon's this year, and I believe we will. After all we have five men in the school team, not a bad average, and I believe Peters should be in—— What was I saying? Oh, yes. Do you mean your doctor forbids you to take any part in House games?' he asked, greatly stirred. 'Surely that cannot be. We don't care about that kind of attitude in Denver's, Humphries.' Then smilingly, 'I expect you'll surprise us all before very long'—which was astonishingly true.

George Andrews wearied of the whole business. He found the housemaster quite exhausting.

'Perhaps I will,' he said, 'and now, if you will excuse me, I will see about my room.'

'Your room,' echoed Mr. Denver, in his obtuse fashion.

'I presume,' said George Andrews, with excessive calm, 'I have a room. To sleep in.'

'Certainly not.'

The indignation, the profound scorn with which

Mr. Denver uttered those two words startled George Andrews. He knew he had said the unpardonable thing.

'You don't understand,' went on Mr. Denver, evidently still struggling with emotion, 'you are the first of your family to come here. Am I right?'

George Andrews admitted it.

'Warrenders,' said Mr. Denver, walking agitatedly up the room, 'is very old. It was founded by William Warrender in 1482, some say 1483. I lean to the former date myself. In those days habits of life were very simple, even primitive. It is our just pride that they are simple to-day. We glory in our traditions. The opposition to change of any character is quite affecting. It affects every old Warrenderian. When you return here in after-years, Humphries, you will appreciate the spirit of my words. Certainly modifications have, of course, been installed from time to time since the days of William Warrender. The ancient rush-lights, which I must admit I prefer for purely sentimental reasons, have been abandoned since 1780. Candles have taken their place. The custom of washing beneath the pump, dating back to antiquity, has also fallen into disuse, and a bath is now installed in each dormitory. There is, I rejoice to say, no hot water at Warrenders. Tomorrow, when you run across the courtyard with

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your bucket and return for your tub, you will recall the voice of the past.'

George Andrews did not deny it.

'In 1860,' continued Mr. Denver, in quite a glow with the heartening tale, 'in 1860, Dr. Rictus, sometime Head of Warrenders, in many respects an unfortunate appointment, introduced breakfast. It was a bold step, and nearly wrecked the school.' Mr. Denver shook his head rather sadly. 'Since then,' he said, 'we have given way in many respects. In the old days there was midday dinner and bread and cheese at sunset. Ample; ample! Now a boy provides his "extras." I presume, Humphries, you have allowed for that? Richards, a place recognised unofficially by the authorities, provides everything necessary and much quite unnecessary.'

It was obvious to a child that Richards was the corner-stone of Warrenders. George Andrews made a note of Richards, filed it mentally, and regarded Mr. Denver with the closest attention.

'Well, Humphries, I expect it's all very bewildering to you.'

'Bewildering, Mr. Denver—it's great.'

'I would be the last to deny it.'

'It is. To pay five hundred per annum and buy your own food is big business, sir—it's an enter-

prise I'd like to look into. I speak, of course, in confidence.'

Mr. Denver had walked over to the window. Had he, during these words, not blown his nose in his peculiar trumpeting fashion he might have been saved some future heart-searching. As it was he merely nodded kindly, feeling confident Humphries had uttered some childish sentiment.

The door opened and Withers ushered in Charles Lucifer, who cast at George Andrews a glance full of meaning, and hastened to say 'Yes, sir,' and 'Oh no, sir,' a great many times. Finally Mr. Denver, knowing (so he stated) that they would both be very close friends, rang for the butler, and instructed him to show the young gentlemen upstairs.

'A moment, Mr. Denver,' said George Andrews, who felt such procedure fringing on discourtesy.

The counter-attack of Mr. Denver was masterly. 'I understand,' he said kindly, 'I know what you're thinking. But we'll face it out, won't we? We'll make a man of ourself. After all, Springburn is with you.'

That final flight of consolation stunned George Andrews. He left the room with bowed head. He realised with deepening dismay that a machine had got a hold of him, and was carrying him to disaster. This impression was given colour by a

nasty dig in the ribs. As Withers was marching ahead it raised a question touching very nearly the last words of Mr. Denver.

Proceeding in silence along a stone-flagged passage—they proceeded up some winding stairs and entered a long saddening dormitory, with tried and battered cubicles upon each side of it. A traditional room. A room with initials scratched upon every inch of it. The kind of room the best kind of novelists revel in. A 'Forty Years On' room.

Charles Lucifer had it in the blood. He was inoculated. But George Andrews was only a financier. It filled him with amazement and alarm.

'Here, Master Humphries,' said the butler, 'is your cubicle.'

George Andrews looked within. It was unbelievable. At home he had a charming suite with a bath-room, and beside his bed a telephone and an electric reading-lamp. Here was desolation.

'Upon your right,' remarked the butler, who had earned his money, 'is Master Springburn. Upon your left, Master Venables. Opposite you, within call, so to speak, are Master Birkin and Master Blythe.'

Satisfied that he had done what he could, he went smoothly away, and George Andrews sat disconsolately upon the bed.

In the corridor there was a noise of footsteps. More new boys. Whispers arose.

'Can you inform me, Springburn—what we do next?' he asked, with absolute courtesy.

For a moment there was no reply. Then Charles Lucifer rounded the corner, his face very red, his fists clenched.

'Look here,' he said, 'don't act the silly goat with me—see? Don't be so free with your "Springburns." I'll punch your nose for tuppence.'

George Andrews pondered upon these words. For some obscure reason he had goaded Springburn to a kind of madness. He wondered whether he might ask him the right time. But in all probability that would send him over the borderline. He realised how careful one must be in this great new world. He set his mind, his vast power of concentration, to work upon it; but the more he thought of Springburn the less could he make of him. He seemed the obscurest, most rudimentary creature he had ever encountered.

'Humphries, come here!'

Springburn was calling him—calling him with incivility—just as though he were an office-boy.

'Yes?' said George Andrews.

'I said "come here."'

'Really,' expostulated George Andrews.

With a bound the other boy, who was smaller and inferior in every way, leaped into his cubicle, and, without a pause, punched him in the ribs, twisted his arm, and banged his nose on the mattress.

‘Had enough?’ he asked at last, but quite without passion.

‘Stop!’ cried George Andrews, ‘stop, or I’ll call the police.’

‘Cheeky, - eh?’ panted Springburn, and this time reversed the process, first banging his nose, twisting his arm, and punching him exhaustingly in the stomach. ‘Better come next time,’ he remarked and disappeared again, leaving George Andrews bruised but calm.

The other new boys clustered at the door, watching him without sympathy. They seemed to him nasty little creatures, very knowing and hostile. Already they were allied together against him. They had a natural dread and suspicion of him—like cattle winding a wolf. There were also certain young gentlemen, warmed by definite wrongs, spurred on by many hours of parental humiliation. Amongst others—Venables, Blythe, Tupper, Birkin, Dugmore, and Springburn—emphatically Springburn.

CHAPTER V

MR. SHERINGHAM



I

IN the midst of all this obscurity Withers thought of Mr. Sheringham. What the House tutor knew he shared. He had no gift of secrecy. He was, to put it crudely, an exceedingly charming, ingenuous, temperamental young man, aged about twenty-six. Quite unlike Withers in every respect. Withers was middle-aged in experience, the useful sort of experience gleaned from handing the liqueurs, telephoning for the right kind of racing gentlemen, valeting in-the-swim financiers. A butler, even a school butler, is apt to be a stock character. He shapes himself on the best novels. He is either old family and does strong faithful parts, or light comedy, with whiskers. Withers was beyond the dreams of fiction. He was too versatile. He had seen too much and knew too much. He was not consistent. There were occasions when he might speak like his former master, Lord Hoylake, whose great services for coal and his party had been recognised after the English

way. There were other days when he handled aspirates with all the ease and contempt of the Honourable Rollo whom he had served in the Lancers. Sometimes a word of pomp and circumstance reminded the Philistine that he had made it almost a religion for two arduous years to see that the eccentric Professor Sluice, of Cambridge, attended lectures not merely in his coat, or his waistcoat, or his trousers, but in all three—underwear not absolutely guaranteed. He had also had acquaintance with an American family, a Highland laird, and an Italian Countess—not, one hastens to add, all at once—and from each and all he had made some little thing his own.

He knew his way about.

Gerald Sheringham, on the other hand, was innocent of guile. He was in debt, backed the wrong horses, and worshipped the Headmaster's daughter from afar. He lived, that is to say, in a world quite removed from that of Withers. His future, so far as these things count, was certain to be interesting, but not enviable. Withers was well aware of it. And yet, in his curious knowing way, he had confidence in the House tutor. He thought a wonderful lot of him, especially when he was listening to Mr. Sheringham, who explained away raw facts so simply, so eloquently. But then Mr. Sheringham was an artist. He wrote books. Not

the kind of luggage packed together by Mrs. Henniker, but novels—airy little comedies raising a smile, but never a frown, keeping no reader up betimes, and creating no nasty scenes at Mudie's. Luncheon parties, with sparkling dialogue; river scenes, with love passages; dances; and, here and there, a touch of drama. The hero began knocking off brilliant, if arid little comments, in the first paragraph, and held right on; the heroine, a dazzling invertebrate, slid in and out again when he lost breath; and there was always a comic middle-aged lady, with a Pekinese. Withers thought very poorly of these novels, three in number. He had read them all with quiet responsibility, and he wished Mr. Sheringham wouldn't. They seemed to him to promote neither laughter nor tears. As an admirer of *Jorrock's* he found them anæmic. At that very moment a copy of the last, *Lady Carnforth's Coronet*, was lying upon the knife-board. He took it up, shook his head over it, and decided to return it to the author. It would make an opening for more vital matters. It is, in life, always desirable to approach a delicate subject by stages. As he crossed the hall the postman dropped letters into the box. He paused and sorted them. There were three for the House tutor. Another opening.

Gerald Sheringham was playing a sad little song when Withers entered. He did not break off, but pursued it to the end. It was called, like all English songs, *My Garden of Roses*, and after tea and muffins made him feel unfailingly pensive. Most of his sentimental comedy was written by candlelight after tea and muffins.

Withers, laying the letters upon the table, crossed over to the window, and made a pretence of retrieving the lump of sugar that had fallen from the bullfinch's cage.

Concluding the tender little refrain, Gerald Sheringham rose and lit a cigarette.

'This book, sir,' remarked the butler. 'I hope I haven't kept it over long.'

The author accepted it, and waited. But Withers stared doggedly at the bullfinch, who, with every sign of advanced years, was singing in a prudent undertone. He had read enough of *Lady Carnforth's Coronet* to cherish no hope. He, as a man of sound judgment in such matters, had suffered a good deal. He had wondered, about page 240, whether it was not his duty to warn Mr. Sheringham that, in his opinion (for what it was worth), there was a limit, a boundary line, beyond which no author should go. As *Lady Carnforth* had already pawned the coronet on page 38, it was

obviously absurd for her to be seen dragging the moat by moonlight on page 106.

‘It is different from your last, sir.’

‘*Sir Richard Blake’s Blunder*—you’re right, Withers, it is. The truth of the matter is I’m not satisfied with my sales. Nor my public. Nor my publisher.’

He tore open a letter savagely. It was from Messrs. Crackthorn & Cumbermere, his publishers, and enclosed a statement of sales. The communication, signed by William Cumbermere, expressed the regret of the firm that his last book, *Lady Carnforth’s Coronet*, had not achieved the success it deserved; that the Colonial orders had been very discouraging; and that the American market had considered the story unsuitable for their public. Mr. Cumbermere suggested that perhaps he might look in at the office some morning for a little chat.

Gerald Sheringham laid down the letter as a monarch might surrender his crown. Then he unfolded the statement of sales. He took it over to the window. Even the bullfinch ceased from singing. To say in black and white that the book had sold only seven hundred odd copies was not merely monstrous—it was simply funny. Sales went up, not down, and *Sir Richard Blake’s*

Blunder had cleared the thousand with a roar, and fairly rushed into the early teens.

'I can't see what good it does sending in things like this,' he burst out. 'It's all wrong. It's clumsy.'

In order to forget the whole matter he opened another letter. It was from Mr. Samuel Feathergay, his solicitor, begging him to look in as soon as convenient to himself. Nothing else. So like a solicitor. It occurred to Gerald Sheringham that, were he a solicitor (or a publisher), he would make it his custom to conclude with some cheery little word, some allusion to town being very empty, or dusty, or both; or, in his particular case, with an aptly-turned phrase expressive of the delight *Lady Carnforth's Coronet* had afforded him.

'Don't go, Withers,' said Mr. Sheringham. 'Any man who brought these letters should see the thing through.' He tore open another envelope. A bill from his tailor, with a little pressing note.

'And lastly——' the words died on his lips. Forgotten publishers, solicitors, tailors. Forgotten Withers, Warrenders, and Denver's. He had received a note from Daphne Henniker, a little note written in her own handwriting. It didn't say much; to be perfectly truthful it said very little.

‘ Dear Mr. Sheringham,

‘ I wonder if you would do me a favour. There is a new boy at Denver’s, called Humphries. He is one long scream. I think he will amuse you, and if you would let him down lightly, it would be so good of you.

‘ Yours sincerely,

‘ DAPHNE HENNIKER.

‘ P.S.—He asked mother if she knew D.P. ! ! ’

‘ Withers,’ said Mr. Sheringham, ‘ is there a new boy called Humphries? ’

The face of the butler underwent an instant change.

‘ If I may say so, sir—there is, and a very remarkable young gentleman he appears.’

‘ Oh ! ’

‘ You didn’t know of him being here, sir? ’

‘ Not I.’

‘ Shall I ask him to step up? ’

‘ You seem anxious about it, Withers—almost unstrung.’

The butler turned and gave an uneasy cough.

‘ In a manner of speaking, I am, sir,’ he said.

‘ I am, Mr. Sheringham. Nor am I the only one—no, not by a long way.’

‘ Is Mr. Denver also feeling the strain? ’

‘ Not Mr. Denver, sir—not Mr. Denver. But

some of the fathers surprised me. Mr. Justice Venables, sir—usually such a cold gentleman.'

'What's the game, Withers?'

The butler grew instantly mysterious.

'That's just what I don't know, sir. *Not yet*. But I will, sir. Presently. I have a kind of strange intuition that I won't be here much longer, sir.'

'Nonsense, Withers, you're as sound as a bell.'

'I was not referring to dying, sir.' He paused, and eyed the bullfinch deliberately. 'We all have our little ambitions, sir. But most ambitions hang on money.'

'They do,' agreed Mr. Sheringham moodily.

'Some of us,' continued the butler, warming up to a favourite topic and dropping into Lord Hoylake, 'want race-'orses, some country 'ouses, some are content just to be married.' As a confirmed bachelor he included the last as an example of how low human vision may sink, and running the palm of his hand across his lips, continued in the same fateful tone: 'For myself, sir, I 'ave always set my 'eart on one thing. TRAVEL. I never want an 'ome, nor company, nor 'abits. I was never a family man nor never will be. All I aspire to is travelling de loox, with a valet. I shall never settle down, sir—I've done too much of that. I should be 'appy if I died at a junction.'

'I think,' remarked Mr. Sheringham, 'we could all do with a bit of travel. I could.'

'We could, sir—we could. Dr. 'enniker, 'e could. Mr. Denver, 'e could. It's broadenin'. The Empire, sir. The wide world. I've no use for suburbans——' and, as a sign of emancipation, cast off Lord Hoylake, and resumed his aspirates.

'But what has this to do with Master Humphries?'

'Perhaps everything, sir. Likewise perhaps nothing. I don't know, but—speaking as a man, not a butler—I'm all on, sir, as the saying is.'

'Sounds like plunging,' said Mr. Sheringham. 'Don't expect too much from new boys, Withers. I never do, and I've never regretted it.'

The butler smoothed his chin, and regarded with composed, determined gaze the bullfinch hopping, in its pleasant security, from perch to perch—regarded it not with interest so much as searchingly, or a man who pierces the unseen.

'There's no such thing as luck, sir,' he said. 'It's surprising how hard anything worth while is to come by. Reminds me of the Honourable Rollo. When I was in the Lancers, sir, our captain—Dare-devil Rolly we called him—said to me one evening, sitting as you might be now, sir: "Withers," he said. "Yes, sir," I replied, seeing at once he had dined. Says he: "Like something

for nothing, Withers? ” “ Thank’ee, sir,” says I, to humour him as the saying is. He got me clean on the left eye, sir—a regular one, I can tell you. He was a wonderful satirical gentleman, Dare-devil Rolly, and broke his neck in ’98, sir—across country. Shall I ask Master Humphries to step up, sir? ’

‘ Yes; and Withers——’

‘ Sir.’

‘ I’ll hand you a note when you return. Do you think you could deliver it to Miss Henniker? It’s—it’s rather important, you know.’

The butler stared hard at the bullfinch.

‘ Is there any answer, sir? ’

Gerald Sheringham considered the point.

‘ No,’ he replied gloomily; ‘ I don’t think there is. Unless I added a postscript.’

‘ Certainly, sir—very proper, I’m sure.’

Mr. Sheringham, greatly encouraged, dived for his pen—then sighed and shook his head.

‘ Yes; but what about? ’ he reflected.

‘ Perhaps the young lady would like to meet Master Humphries, being interested in him.’

Mr. Sheringham laid down the note and shook the butler feelingly by the hand.

‘ There will be an answer, Withers,’ he said.

II

'COME in, Humphries,' cried Mr. Sheringham, standing by the piano, poised to transfer his note to Withers.

George Andrews advanced to the fireplace.

'I understand you wish to see me,' he said; 'but before you state your reasons for desiring this interview, permit me first to ask whether you are the Mr. Gerald Sheringham to whom Miss Henniker referred?'

That was a moment when things might have happened. A public school master is apt to get flurried and make a demonstration.

'I imagine so,' said Mr. Sheringham gravely.

'Well, please be certain. There is, I presume, not more than one Sheringham in Denver's.'

'So far as I'm aware that is so.'

'In that case, I am glad to meet you,' said George Andrews, and took Mr. Sheringham's chair, leaving that gentleman to stand in the outer world. 'I repeat I'm glad to have this opportunity of a chat with you, as otherwise I would have been compelled to see Mr. Denver. To begin with, a boy in whom I had been asked to take an interest has punched me in the abdomen.'

'Impossible!' cried Mr. Sheringham from the darkness.

'One would imagine so, but I regret to say there is every indication that the incident will be repeated. There are several courses open to me in dealing with a matter of this kind.'

'I am all attention.'

'I can lay the matter before Mr. Denver——'

'I wouldn't,' counselled Mr. Sheringham.

'No?'

'Certain. They'd do it again. That stomach punching gets such a hold on people they can't leave off. There was a case at Trinity I recall. Even the dons found it irresistible.'

George Andrews expressed no surprise.

'Secondly, I can return to town——'

'No; you can't.'

'I beg your pardon.'

'I repeat it—you can't.'

'Why not?'

'Because it's against the rules.'

'But, my dear sir, I'm my own master.'

'Not a bit of it. You're simply a new boy at Denver's. A junior has only a nominal existence here. A new boy isn't visible for weeks.'

George Andrews gave Mr. Sheringham a quick, uneasy glance.

'Anyhow,' he said sulkily, 'I've made up my

mind. I'm not going—no; not by a long chalk. I've drawn up my schedule and I'm going to see it through.'

'That's more the spirit,' approved the House tutor, in imitation of Mr. Denver in one of his glad moods.

'Pardon me, but that all depends upon your point of view. Are you a die-hard, Mr. Sheringham; are you an anti-progressive, a reactionary, a backwoodsman? Are you a follower of that obsolete fungus, David Pendlebury?'

'I don't think,' remarked the House tutor, struggling back to shore, 'I am any of these. I am a very modest man, Humphries.'

'I'm glad to hear it, Mr. Sheringham. Now kindly give me your closest attention. I need not say I speak without prejudice——'

'Absolutely.'

'I have seen enough of Warrenders in a few hours to write a memorandum upon it. I have it here, sir—typed. It is, I regret to say, adverse. I will leave it on your table when I go. The points are briefly capitulated, and any criticism you may care to pass will be carefully considered. But upon general principles I may say that I have no use for Warrenders—none.'

Mr. Sheringham covered the bullfinch. He felt some simple symbolic act was called for.

'And yet,' went on George Andrews, 'I do not go so far as to condemn it altogether.' (Mr. Sheringham in the background opened his mouth as of an audience cheering.) 'The financial basis is sound. But the rest is rotten, effete, traditional, and——'

'As an old Warrenderian——' broke in Mr. Sheringham.

'My intention is to remodel the educational system, encourage a practical training, and promote the ideals of democracy so essential to the world of commerce to-day. I contemplate Home Rule.'

'My own feeling,' pursued Mr. Sheringham, who fondly imagined himself rather a rebel.

'I will be faced by opposition, but that I will overcome. There will be three stages in Denver's. The boys, being deeply conservative, will resent change of any character. Secondly, the prefects will fight for their misused privileges. Thirdly, the masters——'

'This,' murmured Mr. Sheringham hurriedly, 'cannot but be painful——'

'The masters,' repeated George Andrews, and halted.

'Well, Humphries?'

'I do not know. It will largely depend upon the attitude they decide to adopt. They are, of course, dependent upon popular opinion.'

'I suppose there is no chance that you will fail. These abdominal attacks are rather disconcerting.'

'None;' said George Andrews with decision, and rose to go. 'I would like to see you again,' he said, 'when you have considered the memorandum.'

'Perhaps,' said Mr. Sheringham, 'you could take tea with me. I have asked Miss Henniker to-morrow at four.'

'How very curious!'

'Oh!'

'Miss Henniker is meeting me at three-thirty.' Mr. Sheringham started.

'Shall we discuss the memorandum then?' he asked, picking up the matchbox off the floor.

'I'm afraid we shall be motoring. Miss Henniker and I have a great deal to talk over. Her sympathies are so wholly with me. Indeed, she has already suggested several admirable schemes which we will knock into shape as time goes on. It is most promising to find the daughter of the Headmaster so sympathetic. I am only sorry that you——'

Mr. Sheringham loomed with extraordinary suddenness out of the darkness.

'You misjudge me, Humphries,' he said warmly. 'I feel too deeply about these things to say much. I am one of the strong, silent breed.'

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Miss Henniker and I agree on everything. Did you say three-thirty?’

George Andrews was a little taken aback.

‘Then I can rely on you for your support?’ he asked.

‘I will stick at nothing.’

‘Of course there’s big money in it,’ said George Andrews; ‘but that’s only by the way.’

The House tutor brushed it aside.

‘Then I’ll say good evening. I expect I will start to-night. They’re waiting downstairs.’

‘Who?’

‘Venables, Blythe, Birkin, Tupper, and Springburn.’

With this ominous chant he nodded and left.

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ said the voice of Withers.

Mr. Sheringham waved him off, and made for the easy chair, where he floundered.

The butler took it upon him to close the door.

‘Meaning no offence, sir—is the young gentleman all there?’

‘If he is,’ replied Mr. Sheringham, and beckoned faintly for stimulant and soda, which, when received, he drank thirstily, ‘if he is, Withers, it’s not only you will go travelling—it’s the whole family party.’

CHAPTER VI

I

IN Denver's a new boy must either become a Bat or an Owl. Outside the membership of these two historic parties is darkness and dismay. Inside is only conflict and oppression. The fundamental purpose of the societies was to nourish a carping hostility towards each other. For that reason they only united under a common affliction, and parted to resume their activities when the cloud had passed. Charles Lucifer, being a Springburn, was of course an Owl—all his people had been Owls. Dick Birkin, now in his third term, was an eminent Bat; and Venables greatly approved in the same circle for his oratorical talent. Numbered in these two societies were the strata of juniors who only counted in bulk, and were not encouraged to develop names or publicity, or anything but absorption into the traditional atmosphere, from which they might emerge to larger recognition when stamped and guaranteed undiluted Warrenders. Following upon such prestige they might ruffle it a bit in the corridors, and, casting off the Bats and

Owls for ever, watch with meditative gaze the great ones, the bloods of the Fifth and Sixth, and practise in remote corners their particular oaths and pleasant habits. Then—great day—when all the resources of the seniors were learned, when all the treasure-trove of Warrenders was laid bare, when a House cap lolled on a group in the study, and a trusty crib in the drawer beneath, then came the zenith of pride and glory, and a man could smoke his pipe up the chimney in the sure and certain knowledge of perfection.

From the moment that the weather-beaten juniors reassembled at Denver's, and scrutinised the new boys, there was an increasing uneasiness regarding George Andrews. There were several members of both parties to whom the name of Humphries had been made familiar at parental breakfasts. There was a deepening curiosity to examine George Andrews. Charles Lucifer, speaking as one who knew, gave a description, not wanting in picturesque detail, of the train journey from London. He electrified his audience. When he came to the typewriter, there was not an Owl nor a Bat present who was not roused to a proper indignation. There were those who freely expressed their conviction that George Andrews would make Denver's the laughing stock of Warrenders. Finally, Birkin and Marshall, the

leaders of the parties, met, with awful solemnity, and decided that immediate steps should be organised to nip such an outrage in the bud. Against such a league and covenant who could hope to prevail?

George Andrews noted signs of the darkening storm. Upon the whole he was satisfied that direct opposition was to be desired. He had always overcome competition. What caused him dismay was the unusual mode of procedure.

It began about ten o'clock that night. After running off a business letter he had jumped into bed. He disliked the bed, but he had his own ideas for the future. Outside in the corridor was a great deal of noise—too much noise in his opinion. The fact that Charles Lucifer was not seeking repose added to his uneasiness. But even then—and until it happened—he could not have credited that such an outrage was possible. It was so contrary to his conception of life. For quite suddenly, when lights were out, he was aware of several boys beside him. Amongst them Charles Lucifer. It was manifest, even to George Andrews, that they had not left their beds to wish him good night.

'What is it?' he asked, with the natural irritation of a householder aroused by a constable in the garden below.

The next few minutes were like a chaotic dream to him afterwards. It was all so quick, competent, and decisive. They rushed at him, on top of him, under him. For a moment his bed appeared to stand upright like a performing bear, then to take a step or two and succumb. Under the bed-things George Andrews struggled violently. He emerged to find several complete strangers punching him indiscriminately, but with obvious pleasure and heartiness. He put up a futile exasperated defence, and went down under a shower of blows from a pillow—his own pillow. Suddenly above the turmoil there sounded a harsh and not unfamiliar sound. Like the dove of peace lost in a cloud of war—a faint distinct tinkle of a bell. The typewriter—they were whacking it to fragments.

‘Stop!’ cried George Andrews fiercely.

They didn’t. They went right on. They investigated his box. They devoured his toffee, single respite of a great man’s idle moments. They made a job of it.

Then, having accomplished a demonstration, they left, and George Andrews sat—sore in body, but resolute in mind—amongst the wreckage. Looking around him he was amazed at the damage they had achieved in so brief a time. It was no longer possible to contemplate readjustment. The only course was to sleep as best he could upon

the floor. But first he must think; this was a situation calling for instant treatment. The market was getting out of hand. It required decisive action. George Andrews sat upon the floor and thought. His silence, his apparent acquiescence, worried the dormitory. There was something coldly ominous and disquieting in his repose. Several times curious faces peered at him from the corridor; but he never raised his eyes. Once Charles Lucifer, scrambling up the side of the adjoining cubicle, sniggered a little and disappeared. But still George Andrews thought. Gradually snores travelled up and down the room. The enemy were sleeping. They were gaining strength for the morrow.

At midnight George Andrews declared war. He did so without undue noise or display type. He produced a travelling writing-case from his port-manteau, flicked on his electric lamp, and wrote a little note addressed to the officiating officers of the juniors. It was quite brief, and went right to the heart of the matter. It requested the leaders of the Bat and Owl parties to elect a representative to defend their interests. Although it said absolutely nothing, there was a curious detachment, an air of *camouflage* combined with nonchalance, that achieved its scientific purpose. It was the Humphries touch.

II

It was six-thirty o'clock upon the next morning when Withers, newly risen, entered the pantry. The sight of George Andrews awaiting him, sitting with some telegraph forms on his knee, gave him quite a turn.

'Morning,' said George Andrews briefly.

The butler, who had, as stated in an earlier chapter, seen the best service, recovered himself. He conquered the suspicion that his mind was darkening.

'You are not an early riser,' commented George Andrews.

That was a fact, crude, perhaps, at six-thirty, but incontrovertible.

'I vary, sir,' said Withers. 'We cannot always run like machines.'

'We must. The point is this—have you any inclination towards making money? Does it interest you?'

That, again, was unfair at six-thirty a.m. An atmosphere so rich is only supportable after a lavish dinner and a sound port. To fling at a thin butler, with an empty stomach, sacred words like that was unsafe. There might have been a casualty.

'It does interest me,' said Withers, like a prisoner under cross-examination, and, lifting a cup, stared at it in a daze.

'I don't mean tips, casual five-pound notes.'

The butler made neither protestation nor affirmation. He simply dropped the cup upon the linoleum. For a man who had seen the best service he could do no more. In that connection the word 'casual' was enough to crack a tea-set.

'I have an idea that you are a man to be trusted. I admit that, placed as I am here, I must be prepared to pay for the services I require. Are you ready to do what I order?'

That was the historical moment in the career of Richard Withers. Lesser men, placed as he was—debating at six-thirty a.m. problems in which five-pound notes were trifles to a new boy—would have taken thought. They might even have refused point-blank; or asked for particulars; or, in a word, deserved obscurity. Let it be remembered that Withers, like all the greatest adventurers in history, burned his boats.

'I am,' he replied.

George Andrews expressed no emotion whatever.

'Then listen. I came to Warrenders for a purpose that does not concern you. The less it interests you the better. But I may say the success or failure of the undertaking is dependent upon

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several minor problems. For example, last night I was the object of an attack.'

'Ah,' said the butler discreetly.

'Episodes of that character must be nipped in the bud. Surely that is obvious to you.'

The butler said nothing. He stared wistfully at George Andrews. Then he foretold the future. He was of those who mingle regret with a kind of relentless accuracy of detail. He felt it right that George Andrews should realise the sort of awful life he was in for.

'The young gents in the House,' he said, 'below the prefects and seniors who top the lot, is 'eaded by a young party called Wingate, a tough young blackguard, if you'll pardon me a-saying so, handy with his fists, and the son of the local Radical member, for whose opinions I 'ave and always 'ave 'ad the most lofty contempt. This Wingate will put you through it, sir. You'll knuckle under or you'll be eaten up. He'll make your life a surprise to yourself. That is, if them Owls and Bats leave you the time.'

'I have issued a challenge,' remarked George Andrews. 'I am determined to uproot all this. It's all wrong. It's anti-progressive.'

The butler did not deny it was open to criticism. He gazed upon the floor. Finding no solace there,

he lifted his dark, secretive face and stared out of the window.

'I agree with you, sir. Your views and mine are similar, if I may take the liberty. But I am a butler. I have the pantry.'

No one but a man of infinite taste and delicacy could have drawn attention to a discreditable truth more gently. George Andrews caught his meaning. He was suddenly compelled to appreciate the prospect of overwhelming numbers.

'Who,' he asked bluntly, 'will the juniors ask to represent them? Wingate? If so, were Wingate in liquidation I suppose the rest would follow?'

Withers stirred. A momentary flash of light kindled in his face and vanished.

'A knock-out blow, Master Humphries—that's the only hope of a quiet life in Denver's. But what's the use of talking? Talking won't 'elp. It's hitting that counts among the juniors. An 'ook on the jaw is a wonderful persuader. Quite dazzlin'.'

'So I supposed,' said George Andrews, briefly. 'Now that is cleared off kindly pay me the most careful attention. These are your instructions for to-day. These telegraph forms must be despatched. Can you read them?'

The butler, whose bank account had, in the dog-days, been greatly stimulated by the telegrams of other gentlemen, thought he could. He repeated aloud, and with perfect control, that 'George Andrews Humphries must return to London at once'; he read another that conveyed nothing to him at the moment. Then his nerve failed. There was a wire to be forwarded, via London, to himself. It said his Aunt Eliza was not likely to live through the night.

'That means,' explained George Andrews quickly, 'you must get leave of absence.'

'But I haven't an Aunt Eliza,' broke in the butler.

George Andrews gave him a meaning glance.

'I forgot,' said Withers apologetically, 'it is so long since I have seen her.'

'Exactly. When this is delivered you must go immediately to Mr. Denver. He will understand. And meet me at the bridge over the river at ten o'clock. We will motor to town.'

'Yes, sir.'

'When we arrive in London you will go straight to this address and deliver this letter. Give any details that are necessary. But I rely upon you to carry the matter through. Spare no expense. If for some cause or another there is any difficulty, wire for me. Here is thirty pounds to be going on

with. I suppose you've heard of Mr. Barney Plugg?' and he pointed to the address on the envelope.

The butler knit his brows. He had long since ceased to know anything. His Aunt Eliza had severed his connection with the commonplace.

But he was not equal to the climax.

'I learned from Mr. Sheringham at one a.m.,' remarked George Andrews, 'that Barney Plugg is the champion middle-weight. Under no condition must you return without his consent to come here at once. Make him. That is plain sailing, isn't it?'

The butler made a single heroic gesture. It indicated that, although frail mortal speech had failed him, he was, if not tried too far, still captain of his soul!

III

George Andrews did not return to the dormitory. He went instead to Dr. Henniker's, and, rousing an infuriated man-servant, left a note and a sovereign for discreet delivery to Daphne, asking her to be so good as to be at the bridge over the river at ten o'clock. It contained no

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pleasantries. It had been rattled off, at about three a.m., upon Mr. Sheringham's machine, together with a number of other letters.

Proceeding, George Andrews walked down the High Street to the Bull. He aroused somebody else, and again departed in the same composed fashion towards Denver's. By this time the assembled Bats and Owls, having plunged themselves into one traditional bath, were aware of his empty cubicle. They were also profoundly moved by his communication. Those astute detectives, Richardson and Potter, so swift to pounce upon the obvious, proclaimed that Humphries' bed had not been slept in. Following upon this blinding truth they dared greatly and gave it out as their conviction, based upon several clues, that Humphries had run away or committed suicide. It was impossible for them, considering their profession, to indicate which event they would prefer.

Considerably shaken by an incident that was quite unparalleled in the history of Denver's, and therefore neither welcome nor to be countenanced, the Bats and Owls handed the Humphries ultimatum from hand to hand. They had simply never heard of such a thing. That was the primary emotion—a resentment and incredulity. There followed a natural desire for action, a gathering of

the Birkins and Blythes and Larkins. It was decided, amidst scenes of unexampled enthusiasm, that George Andrews should be produced before a council of four representative Bats and Owls to receive judgment. A discussion whether the punishment should be a junior's swishing or a miscellaneous booting was opened. In a moment of inspiration Birkin suggested a prize-fight. It was at this point in the proceedings that George Andrews was good enough to appear, thus relieving the delegates from a deepening bewilderment and responsibility.

He was escorted by a herd of juniors into their common room—a place reserved for book-lockers, the occasional hour of toil, the essential imposition, and all scenes affecting the public weal.

The four representatives of the masses received George Andrews in a constrained and judicial silence. Such a silence as their respected parents—Sir John Birkin, M.P., then upon a Parliamentary Committee; Justice Venables, momentarily foiled of an aside; Sir Roderick Blythe, awaiting a medical inspiration; Patrick Larkin, pondering another intolerable injustice—might well have envied and approved. An Anglo-Saxon silence. A silence of Empire.

'Now, gentlemen,' said George Andrews

briskly, 'I won't detain you long—indeed I cannot, as a telegram has just arrived recalling me to town——'

That was too rich. The outer circle of Bats and Owls surged inwards. They ached to roll him in the historic dust.

'I therefore wish to know whether you, as delegates of the other little boys' ('Hack him, you men,' from an indignant Bat) 'are prepared to give me satisfaction for the outrage of last night——' (Remainder of sentence lost in menacing clamour.)

The four representatives wriggled uneasily. They exchanged bewildered glances. As men of action they turned to Venables, a thin, spectacled youth, doomed for King's and the Inner Temple.

'In your letter,' he said, 'you indicate——'

'I never indicate,' snapped George Andrews. 'I issued a challenge. Is it accepted or not?'

A dead silence fell at those decisive words. 'Yes,' said Venables, somewhat shaken; 'I think I may say it is.'

'Very good. Now we know where we stand. My conditions are simple enough. Briefly these'—and George Andrews produced a typed document. 'Negotiations of this character require arrangement. I must therefore lay emphasis upon the inclusion of the following clause, namely:

“That George Andrews Humphries, of Lombard Buildings, London, E.C., and Denver’s House, shall be permitted complete immunity from all molestation during the space of one month.”’

Again it was touch-and-go whether the audience did not arise and sweep like an avenging tide over the speaker.

‘Hello! you men.’

That saved George Andrews from annihilation. A dark, heavily-built boy of sixteen, gifted with a square face and a bullet head, came lurching through the juniors. George Andrews, knowing instinctively it was Wingate, hadn’t felt so badly since the heavy fall in ’07. He was glad he had taken a chair. But at the sight of him the representatives of the masses took heart. They conferred hastily together. George Andrews distinctly heard ‘five bob’ mentioned in some connection quite obscure.

Venables drew the new arrival aside. He gesticulated a great deal, breathed on his spectacles, wiped them on the edge of his coat, and gave Wingate little telling persuasive taps on the arm. To the enormous relief of George Andrews Wingate shook his head. The splendid fellow was adamant. Again Venables, joined by Birkin, muttered hoarsely in his ear. ‘Seven and sixpence’ was dragged into view, and it was evident

the great man was softened. George Andrews acted instantly. He tore a piece of paper out of his pocket-book, wrote upon it, 'I'll give you 50 per cent. more than any offer, to hold out,' folded it, and wrote 'Wingate' upon the outer flap. It was a critical moment, but there was a second in hand. He caught the eye of a very small and innocent boy standing at his elbow, gave him the note, and watched him worming his way through the crowd. Unhappily that amiable child was obstructed. Charles Lucifer snatched the message from his fingers, read it, gave George Andrews a burning glance of Springburn scorn, and tore it into small pieces. At the same dramatic moment Wingate, shaken by a pledge of ten shillings (to be returned in full if defeated), weakened.

'Fight him in a month?' he said slowly. 'Why not now—here?'

'Because,' said Venables, 'we must arrange to get our money back in sitting accommodation.'

'Don't refuse, Wing,' urged Tom Bowlby, a particular satellite.

'Let Humphries have no cause for appeal,' pressed Venables.

'Besides,' said Birkin, whose father had done so nicely in Variety Theatres, 'if we pay we want our money's worth. Humphries wouldn't last a round to-day.'

'Righto,' growled Wingate, 'in a month. But don't blame me for what you'll get,' he added thoughtfully to George Andrews, and went heavily away.

In the absolute stillness George Andrews rose, and, laying his copy of the agreement upon the table, handed a duplicate to Venables, who hastened to repolish his spectacles with a shaking hand.

'Kindly sign there,' he said quietly, 'and when they are stamped by my solicitor I will return your copy.'

At those priceless words the other three representatives looked as full of understanding as three hard-boiled eggs, but considerably warmer. Only Venables, clinging to the shadow of his father, rallied and signed his name. This he smudged, thrust the wrong end of his pen into his mouth, dropped his spectacles, and was seen no more.

George Andrews collected his papers, turned, and prepared to leave. The circle of Bats and Owls opened for him with the galling reflection that, for the space of one month, or until Wingate wiped the floor with him, he was a hostage, sacred by all the laws of primitive warfare.

In that preternatural quiet, Hakes, the funny man of Denver's, saw his way. He began to

shout: 'Fifty to one against Humphries, gentlemen, fifty to one taken and offered. Fifty to one the field bar one. Patronise the old firm, gentlemen, follow the old——'

The eye of George Andrews quickened. He halted at the door. 'Fifty to one?' he said keenly. 'Here, I'll take you in guineas.'

Which was the eclipse of the funny man.

CHAPTER VII

I

DAPHNE HENNIKER was sitting upon the bridge wall. She had been aware of Sheringham's approach for some little time. Their mutual surprise was a lesson in good taste.

'A lovely morning,' she said.

'Is it?' returned Mr. Sheringham, with genuine interest.

'Well, it's there for you to see.'

'So it is. I'm sorry if I'm off-hand about it. The fact is if you live with a morning as long as I have your critical sense gets dulled. I watched it beginning to break—an impressive sight. Many people would never believe how quiet everything is about four a.m.'

'Had you toothache?' asked Daphne, with sympathy.

'No—George Andrews. He slipped in about one and left at four-thirty. They are hours that never return. I only mention this in explanation. I know the day's simply terrific. I've written about days like this. I've written,' pursued Mr. Sheringham, with a tender note, 'about bridges

like this. When I realised that it was *you*, Miss Henniker——'

'Tell me,' she said hurriedly, 'about George Andrews. Why did he spoil your sleep?'

Mr. Sheringham sighed.

'He was uncertain whether Barney or Plugg is the champion middle-weight. I suppose indecision of that kind does haunt one sometimes. I told him, and went to sleep. Other men might have argued about it, shown petulance, or refused to answer. That's all wrong. It's touch-and-go at one a.m. But when he lit the gas, started my typewriter, and whistled to keep himself warm, I lost ground. I said if he would excuse me I'd get up.'

'I think you're very good-natured. What was the trouble?'

Mr. Sheringham shook his head, smiled pathetically, and watched with growing interest a figure in black ascending the hill.

'Warrenders. He says it's all wrong. He doesn't believe in the place, or William Warrender, or the games, or the food, or Waterloo, or the things we teach so patiently, or the teachers thereof. He is going to push it off on a new basis. I wonder why he doesn't settle the Irish Question.'

'Poor father,' said Daphne.

'It's all very painful. This morning—or do you call it last night—I felt my position very keenly.

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I don't think new boys should know anything about typewriters. It's all this deplorable modern spirit. I would have made a scene, but, as he was wearing my dressing-gown, I was compelled to sit in a tartan rug; my grandmother's clan—red, with yellow and green stripes. That silenced me. I know you will understand.'

'Besides,' said Daphne, 'it's all very funny.'

Mr. Sheringham gazed at her for some time with unmistakable and pensive eyes.

'Yes,' he admitted, 'put that way, I suppose it is. But will it continue to be funny? Perhaps I am pessimistic, but, after all, I am a master. My association with Humphries might be misinterpreted by malicious persons. After all, it was *my* typewriter. Supposing I were to get "the push"—pardon the expression, but I think the tragic is always most easily borne by a touch of vulgarity.'

'It would be worth it,' said Daphne, with spirit.

'I daresay you're right.' He started suddenly, seeing a man in a bowler hat silhouetted at the end of the bridge. 'I say, shall we walk on to the moor?'

'If you like.'

'I'm rather dished,' said Mr. Sheringham, in an off-hand fashion. 'You remember that last book of mine—'

'Lady Carnforth's Coronet?'

'That's it. It hasn't sold.'

'But it must,' she said emphatically, 'it only requires advertising and pushing. Why not change your publisher, Mr. Sheringham?'

'Perhaps I'm no catch.'

'How can you be so stupid? I wish I——' she halted and stared hurriedly at the river.

'I wish,' said Mr. Sheringham softly, 'that you could.'

'Any other worry?' asked Daphne, feeling the silence extraordinarily confidential and tender.

'Here you are,' said the voice of George Andrews. ('Damnation' was written on Mr. Sheringham's heart.)

'Yes, here we are,' cried Daphne, relieved of a situation developing too rapidly. 'And now, what does all this excitement mean?'

'It means, Miss Henniker, we leave for town very shortly. My car is on the bridge there. We will be back this evening. I have made all arrangements. Mr. Sheringham here is going to see his publisher. He has told me all about it, and I think we can probably advise him in due course. On the bridge there is Withers, the butler. He is arranging some confidential business of mine. You, Miss Henniker, will, I hope, give me the pleasure of your company to-day. I have some

important matters to attend to in the City, but doubtless you can do some shopping. It is, I am afraid, the last occasion of this nature for a few weeks. Let us make it a memorable one.'

Mr. Sheringham, during this amazing outburst, had clutched at one word—'Withers.' He heard no more, but remained deeply stirred by the presence of the butler, stationary on the bridge. Never, even in his lightest comedies, had he treated a butler with such levity.

But Daphne shook her head. Emphatically.

'I simply couldn't,' she said. 'I'm sorry, but it's out of the question.'

Mr. Sheringham heard the words afar off. He felt a sinking, a blank.

'Not coming, Miss Henniker,' he cried. 'Oh, surely you could make it all right with Dr. Henniker?'

'Could you?' asked Daphne simply.

He recoiled at the very thought.

'I understood it was just a motor run,' she went on, turning to the small figure of George Andrews beside her.

'It is a motor run,' he said, obstinately.

'To London. That's quite different.'

'I've arranged a dinner,' he remarked. 'I wired it through to the Carlton. You pretended you liked eating——'

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'I do! I do!'

'No, you don't, or you wouldn't sneak out.' To use such a juvenile term showed how strongly moved he was.

'I'm not sneaking out.'

Mr. Sheringham, greatly distressed by this painful duologue, hastened to intervene. He felt it would be unfair if Miss Henniker, so charming in her indignation, boxed George Andrews' ears in full view of his chauffeur.

'Miss Henniker is right, Humphries,' he said quietly. 'Were I her father I would be shocked at the idea of such an expedition,' and flushing with humiliation and chagrin, he stared along the road upon which, in the far distance, a cloud of dust was rising.

George Andrews also watched the road.

'I allowed for all this,' he muttered.

'All what?' asked Daphne indignantly.

'Backing out,' returned George Andrews.

'Miss Henniker,' broke in Mr. Sheringham, with established heroism, 'is not backing out.'

'Thank you,' said Daphne.

'Not at all,' he returned, with an intimate glance.

Along the road, coming at enormous speed towards them, was a huge grey car.

'It's going,' said Mr. Sheringham, without any finer intention than provoking normal conversation.

'It's five minutes over time,' snapped George Andrews.

'Ah,' said the House tutor blankly.

Suddenly, amidst swirls of dust, the car drew up, and Daphne, starting forward suddenly, began to utter primitive cries of welcome and surprise.

'Babette! Aunt Babette!'

George Andrews swung round on Mr. Sheringham. 'A chaperon,' he said, 'was essential,' a prudence Mr. Sheringham entirely supported.

Daphne's aunt, a laughing sentimentalist in the middle forties, pounced on George Andrews. 'Did you send for me,' she shrieked, 'at five this morning?'

'It was necessary,' replied George Andrews quietly. 'You will return here to-night, and to-morrow the chauffeur will take you home. You brought some clothes?'

'My dear boy, I thought somebody was dying. I haven't lost a minute. What's it all about? Daphne, what is it? Are you eloping?'

'Don't be stupid, Babette. Miss Pendlebury—Mr. Sheringham.'

'How-do-you-do.' They bowed. 'Now, what did that boy say about to-night?'

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‘Let us get in,’ said George Andrews. ‘Miss Pendlebury, will you sit in this car? Mr. Sheringham. Withers, in front, please.’

The doors were shut, the car started, and Mr. Sheringham jumped up too late. George Andrews had cornered Daphne.

‘I don’t see why I should travel for hours on an empty stomach to chaperon myself,’ said Aunt Babette, with an upward glance that had lost nothing with years. Mr. Sheringham faltered. He suppressed a wild desire to stand up and shake his fist at George Andrews for the dastardly act. Then meeting Miss Pendlebury’s eye he softened. After all she was Daphne’s aunt—and Mr. Sheringham adored the early forties.

In the deserted road George Andrews placed the rug carefully around Daphne, slammed the door, caught up the speaking-tube, and—with one single, magic, unnecessary word—completed the incident.

‘London.’

That was the Humphries touch.

II

It was about two o’clock when Withers approached the residence of Mr. Jim Plugg, known to all patrons of the Ring as ‘The Mile-

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End Wonder.' He did not care much about the district, and his quiet, but distinguished figure had already raised comment by the time he knocked upon the door of Mr. Plugg. He was further discomposed by the suspicious fluttering of the dirty curtains that commanded the pavement. He knocked again.

'Stop it, will yer?' shouted a man in a dirty sweater. 'What is it, what's all this knocking abaht? Oo are yer? The rates?'

'I want to see Mr. Plugg,' said Withers.

'Well, see away,' responded the gentleman in the sweater. 'I'm 'ere. No charge. Anything else?'

'Perhaps I might have a word with you?' pursued Withers, in rather a flutter.

'Look 'ere,' cautioned the pugilist. 'I'll tell yer something. I don't 'alf take to yer. No. I tell yer straight I don't. There's something about yer that gets me. You're not a lord and you're not the rates. Tony!' he called, 'come 'ere a minute.'

He was joined by another gentleman in a dirty sweater and with a blue face.

'This bloke,' explained Mr. Plugg, in a hoarse aside, 'wants to see me.'

'Then see 'im,' remarked Mr. Barney, who was not a visionary.

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'Wot is he?' shot back Mr. Plugg. 'A 'tec?'

'Not 'e,' snorted Mr. Barney, 'more like a nundertaker.'

Mr. Plugg considered the point in a heavy silence.

'I have a letter here,' broke in Withers, 'but I would prefer to explain the situation.'

'The Law,' said Mr. Barney instantly, ''eave 'im out, Jim.'

'I am not the Law,' put in Withers hastily.

'Then wot are yer?'

That was a trying moment for one whose heart was set upon travelling *de luxe*.

'A butler,' he replied.

The pugilists nodded at each other.

'Come in,' said Mr. Plugg shortly, and closed the door upon a crowd of some sixty interested spectators.

In a room given over to refreshments, tobacco, boxing-gloves, and dumb bells, Mr. Barney drew up chairs to the table.

'Now,' said Mr. Plugg, 'wot's it all abaht?'

The butler gave an uneasy smile.

'It's about a fight,' he answered.

'Fight,' replied Barney, and brightened.

''ave a glass of beer, mister,' said Mr. Plugg.

'My master has issued a challenge, and it is essential that he should win.'

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'We can't work miracles,' muttered Mr. Barney.
'What weight is 'e?'

'His age is fifteen,' said Withers.

It was from every point of view an unfortunate remark. It gave a wrong impression.

'e's drunk,' shouted Mr. Plugg, kicking over his chair, 'the bloke's maudlin'—that's wot 'e is.'

Withers raised one panic-stricken hand.

'I am not, gentlemen.'

'Off 'is chump,' remarked the more charitable Mr. Barney, 'I'll chuck the nod to the copper——'

'Stop!' cried Withers tragically. 'I'll give you five pounds to hear me out,' and he laid a note on the table.

'Gent's sane enough,' said Mr. Plugg, 'don't you be so off-hand, Barney. Let a chap 'ave 'is bit o' fun.'

'It's not fun,' said Withers. 'It's a fact. The question is this—are you prepared to train Master Humphries in a month for his fight?'

'Age fifteen,' repeated Mr. Barney, 'we'd never live it down.'

'It's a wheeze,' said Mr. Plugg, 'it's a put-up game. We don't do music-'all work, mister.'

'Perhaps,' remarked Withers, 'you will read this letter.'

Without enthusiasm Mr. Plugg opened the envelope.

Inside was a post-dated cheque for £50. He stared at it for a considerable time, scratched his head, eyed the butler with deepening bewilderment, and pored over the letter.

‘Listenin’, Tony,’ he asked at last.

‘Ain’t I just,’ rejoined Mr. Barney.

‘Gent writes that he will pay all exes for trainin’, ’otel bills—listenin’, Tony?’

‘Get a move on,’ said Mr. Barney impatiently.

‘Ho! Well, ’ere’s the punch. If ’e wins ’e’ll ’and over two ’undred and fifty quid down. If ’e loses one ’undred and fifty. And ’ere is fifty to be goin’ on with.’

‘Age fifteen?’ queried Mr. Barney again.

‘Age fifteen,’ echoed the butler solemnly.

‘Go out for some beer,’ said Mr. Plugg suddenly. ‘I’ve got the needle——’

‘Well,’ said Withers, considerably later, ‘I hope you will see your way to signing the agreement.’

Mr. Plugg stared with childlike wonder at Mr. Barney, and both referred with one accord to the tankard.

‘I think I was mistook in you, mister,’ said ‘The Mile-End Wonder’ at last. ‘I take it back. I was feelin’ low. I see now that you are one of the right sort.’

‘You’re too ‘asty,’ put in Mr. Barney. ‘What if Mister Withers ‘ad taken the ‘uff and ‘ooked it. Supposin’ we’d never ‘eard of Master ‘umphries.’

‘Drop it,’ threatened Mr. Plugg, unable to contemplate such a monumental disaster.

‘Then I must be going,’ said the butler. ‘He returns to-night.’

‘Tell the young gent we will arrive to-morrow. At the Lion. Tony—“Master ‘umphries.” No ‘eel-taps.’

‘Oh,’ said Withers, with a faint smile. ‘Your fares. I forgot. Will you sign for receipt of ten pounds?’

Mr. Plugg was willing then, as always, but coming so suddenly upon a very searching half-hour, his hand lost its cunning.

‘You, Tony,’ he said, and, grasping the empty tankard, hurried into the street. When he returned Jim Plugg rose to say a few words. He felt the occasion demanded it. ‘Tony,’ he said, and glared at the Pride of Putney. ‘Tony, wot abaht Mister Withers?’

In an eloquent silence both gentlemen took refuge in refreshment. They accompanied the butler to the door. They watched his thin, immaculate figure until it passed, without a backward glance, round the corner. Then, moved by

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a mutual impulse, they hastened up the street and stared again after his diminishing form with hungry, incredulous gaze.

III

In the old days the author used to approach the publisher's place of business upon all fours. He proffered his manuscript and ran. But since the agent, that man of steel, has leaped between the publisher and his daily bread, the author resides in his country seat, and—staring far out to sea where his yacht rides at anchor—broods upon a compromise between Popularity (dreaded word!) and Art.

Gerald Sheringham entered the office of Messrs. Crackthorn & Cumbermere quite briskly. He was shown into their waiting-room. It was cold and dark, and upon the table were announcement lists, prospectuses, and copies of the latest heavy sellers. These he eyed askance. Above the fireplace was the photograph of the Rev. Rufus Peahen, D.D., whose little books of prayer, meditation, exhortation, confirmation, problems asked and problems answered, had, with the small and adequate royalties of the Victorian era, made publishing a gentlemanly and genial calling.

As Gerald Sheringham waited his spirits drooped. The room was perfectly silent, and smelt

of old dead books written by authors whose names were unknown to him, and who were probably also dead and forgotten. The windows were streaked with yellow lines, where drops of rain had crept down the panes. There was a square partition between the waiting-room and the clerks' room next door, through which he was in a position to watch the advertising clerk ruminating over a telling *cliché*. The advertising clerk, Mr. Jordan by name, had been associated with Messrs. Crackthorn & Cumbermere since he had entered the office as a little boy at the beck and call of every other person within hail. By that admirable means the office-boys of Messrs. Crackthorn & Cumbermere grew up with a sure knowledge of every department, and so attained in course of years to a particular niche such as Mr. Jordan now occupied. It must not be thought Mr. Jordan was acquainted with the psychology of advertising or the values of publicity, or even had an acquaintance with the authors or the books he handled. Nor did he believe in the journalese that Mr. Hendrie, the young director, sometimes shot at him. It seemed to him cheap, and he had every belief that his predecessor, old Mr. Hodge, had never spoken of Dr. Peahen's books as 'charged with realism and yet pent up with the purity of a misguided passion.'

It all came through the innovation of novels (Mr.

Hendrie again), which, in the hands of dear old Mr. Carbunkle, the town traveller, were soon hurried into a deserved and fortuitous obscurity.

At the moment when Gerald Sheringham was staring pensively at the advertising clerk, Mr. Jordan was shaken with conflicting emotions. He could not decide whether to describe a new book of sermonettes by Canon Cullpepper as 'A Book for Eventide' or 'A Volume for the Fireside.' Possibly the pleasant September sunlight penetrated to the recess where Mr. Jordan crouched, for, with a little decisive nod of his head, he plunged for the former, wrote under the title 'Daintily Bound in Yapp, 2/6 net.' and, clutching his hat, disappeared for lunch, and dominoes. Gerald Sheringham was sorry to see him go. He felt uneasy and depressed. Presently a very small boy asked him to follow, and pelted upstairs. When he reached the room occupied by Mr. Cumbermere he was out of breath. He was also put out, because he had expected to meet Mr. Hendrie. The senior partner was an elderly man with a lingering grey moustache, a drooping figure, and a habit of falling into prolonged and mournful silences against which no author could hope to make a stand.

'Well, Mr. Sheringham,' he said, 'how are you? Well, I hope. Things very quiet just now.'

Mr. Cumbermere was not referring to politics or social activities. He was merely creating a favourable atmosphere for a little business chat.

'Books not selling?' inquired Mr. Sheringham airily.

'Selling, my dear sir,' echoed Mr. Cumbermere, and uttered a rueful laugh, 'they're dead, my dear fellow. There were days, I suppose, when there was something in publishing. Not now.'

'Still, I suppose some books make fortunes,' hazarded Mr. Sheringham, rallying a little.

The senior partner gave him a curious intimate glance.

'I wonder,' he said slowly. Now, if Mr. Cumbermere, who ought to be in an advantageous position to express an opinion, wondered, it was almost an impertinence to contest the point.

'And yet,' he proceeded dolefully, 'one must publish. One cannot shut down.' Mr. Sheringham nodded sympathetically and wondered why. 'One book sometimes keeps another alive. But there is so much to contend with. You would be surprised. Wet weather; hot weather; fine evenings; the winter season. All very adverse. Reading is terribly dependent on the climate and the absence of all other subjects of interest. A Lord Mayor's procession blocks the streets.

Result—trade killed. A public funeral. Consequence—a run on devotional books. Against my advice,’ said Mr. Cumbermere, with a faint gleam of fire, ‘this firm has set its face against evangelical literature. With an author like the late Dr. Peahen national disasters could be faced with equanimity.’

From that point Mr. Sheringham began to droop.

‘Novels,’ resumed the senior partner, ‘are different—quite different. Mr. Hendrie believes in them. But will he do so in ten years? I doubt it—I doubt it very much. He lives in the clouds, Mr. Sheringham, looks purely at the literary merits of an MS. It remains for me to estimate *the loss*. Which reminds me——’

Uttering these ominous words, Mr. Cumbermere took up his local telephone, pushed a knob, and said to some person unseen: ‘*Carnforth’s Coronet*, Mr. Sykes, how many in stock.’ (Incredulous pause.) ‘No, no, surely we’ve sold more than that. . . . Yes, I know; but we got rid of a Colonial edition rather under the cost of the sheets——’ Mr. Sheringham lowered his head over *The Times*. When Mr. Cumbermere laid down the receiver he made several neat little calculations on paper, gave Mr. Sheringham a thoughtful look, and sighed.

‘Unfortunately,’ he remarked, ‘your sales are

hardly remunerative, less remunerative than I had believed'—which, coming from the senior partner, was sufficiently arresting. 'As I was saying to Crackthorn only this morning, I'm really afraid we must draw in our horns.' Pausing a moment, Mr. Cumbermere gently cleared his throat, and then repeated, with apparent sincerity, a statement that he had grown to love and cherish as a mother hovers above her only child. 'Publishing,' he said, 'has fallen a prey to the literary agent and the trade. You would be astonished were you to know the number of houses that drop money upon every new book they issue.'

Gerald Sheringham contrived a sympathetic smile. The melancholy cadences of the senior partner rang in his ears like a lament for the deceased. He did not know whether Mr. Cumbermere would weep outright, but he hardly dared hope he could crush much longer such sterling emotion.

'I want to be quite frank,' he resumed, clinging to his moustaches. 'I don't want you to feel we regret our losses on your books. We don't. But times change, and our reader warns us that your work is not sufficiently *modern*.'

'Modern,' broke in the author, touched on the raw.

'I simply repeat his words. I make no personal

comment. Nowadays, so Mr. Hendrie informs me, the authors who count are acquainted with social problems. They get very close to life. Dickens, Mr. Sheringham, without dragging in his humour. I suppose you couldn't write something like this. I'll read you a passage in italics. Mr. Hendrie broke down when he came to it. I make no comment myself.'

Pausing, Mr. Cumbermere smothered the yawn of a confirmed dyspeptic, and referred to the MS. upon the table. 'It's about a housemaid,' he explained, 'who runs away with the butcher's boy. Here is a bit that shows the extraordinary restraint of the author, Harold Whippet. Many a writer would have lost his head at a scene so drenched in the Russian spirit. The butcher boy's mother has just discovered them crouching behind the dustbin.'

'“She wiped her nose. Her face turned purple, then crimson, then mottled. She leaned a little forward, jerked a hand to her hair. . . Steadied it. . . She took off the lid of the ashbin. . . She lifted her right hand. . . Then flinging a kipper skin inside she replaced the lid and shuffled down the area.”’

Mr. Cumbermore laid down the MS. 'I am informed,' he said, 'that a second-rate author could never have resisted making the unhappy mother throw the kipper at the butcher's boy. He

would have worked up a strong incident. In the opinion of our reader the tragic self-denial of that poor woman is one of the most astounding passages in modern letters. I make no personal comment. The book will, I am sure, create a sensation in the Press, and prove a substantial loss.'

Gerald Sheringham stared at him in a dream.

'After all,' said Mr. Cumbermere more brightly, 'you are young. You are, I gather, fortunate in your profession. Strike out a new line. One never knows with the public. We would like to publish for you, Mr. Sheringham. But you see our little problem.'

Yes, Mr. Sheringham had fully grasped their little problem. He felt the only gentlemanly thing he could do would be to leave the office at once.

'At the same time,' remarked Mr. Cumbermere more briskly, 'we shall always be glad to consider your work.'

But Mr. Sheringham was too far gone to rally. He stumbled into the sunshine, and beckoned a taxi with a palsied hand.

'Carlton,' he said.

He decided he would emigrate. In about thirty years he would return, rich, unrecognised, and beautifully sad, and take Daphne's children to the Zoo. It was not a scene after the Whippet school, but it helped Mr. Sheringham considerably.

CHAPTER VIII

I

SITTING in the club smoke-room, Sir Daniel Springburn was feeling rather low. He had come to the conclusion that, unless something turned up, the financial question could only be regarded as deplorable. It meant retrenchment; letting Springburn, Berkshire; living on twopence a week; and was, in brief, not to be contemplated. Upon the other hand there were sharp little problems. His experience of the Stock Exchange had been saddening. Little certainties proffered to him in all good faith by acquaintances 'in the know' had narrowed his circle of friends, and led to several spirited passages. There was Charles Lucifer. He was no help whatever. He and his Aunt Caroline (who kept house at Springburn, much to Sir Daniel's regret) stood shoulder to shoulder. They were aristocratic to the core. They moved above poverty or riches, success or failure, humour or tragedy. They were the product of centuries of high breeding, and, at a crisis of this nature, they clenched their teeth and looked down their noses. When Sir Daniel thought of Charles

Lucifer and Caroline his mind was dark with profanity. It was quite out of the question to make either of them understand the relation of money to life. They ignored it. It left them cold. Caroline had often said she would rather die than contemplate such a subject. At those glowing words Sir Daniel always struggled to crush back the vulgar and ungentlemanly retort. For Caroline lived. She was a woman who never went away, never admitted to the slightest indisposition, and persisted in treating Sir Daniel as a broken-hearted widower—an attitude peculiarly galling to a man of his genial temperament and embarrassing financial condition. The whole business was enough to make him dispirited. Here he was, in his prime, worried off his sleep by idiotic sums that came out worse every month. He had nothing in common with Charles Lucifer, who took after his wife's people, the Croomes; and, so far as he could judge, it was improbable that his son would lift a finger to assist him should an opportunity arise. A pretty state of affairs.

'Hello, Springburn!' roared a large crimson gentleman. 'Going strong, eh?'

'No,' snapped Sir Daniel; 'I'm fed up.'

'Weather, eh? Beastly hot, what?' He touched the bell. 'A fellow in the know——' he began, in an apoplectic aside.

'Rot,' snarled Sir Daniel. 'If I ever risk another penny I'll be——'

'Mr. G. A. Humphries on the 'phone, sir,' said a servant.

'Excuse me,' muttered Sir Daniel hurriedly, 'back in a minute,' and rushed out of the smoke-room.

A few minutes later he was on the club steps, a taxi drawing up.

'Carlton!' he shouted, and leaped in.

II

'I want this,' said George Andrews about half an hour later, 'to be an occasion.'

Sir Daniel, warmed with a cocktail, felt sure it was one already, and flashed a smile at Miss Pendlebury.

'This is my last opportunity for four weeks. This day month, Sir Daniel, I expect you to support me at Warrenders.'

'Whatever for?' asked Daphne.

'That,' said Sir Daniel hilariously, 'is a great secret, Miss Henniker. Even I don't know very much as yet.'

'I hope father would approve,' murmured Daphne.

'I'm perfectly certain he wouldn't,' retorted Sir Daniel.

Mr. Sheringham did not care about this merri-ment. It struck him as unreal. It lacked the earnest note indicated by Mr. Cumbermere. It was just the kind of thing he must overcome. He proceeded to conquer it by staring at Daphne.

'I want you all,' said George Andrews, 'to choose your own dinners. Have thumpers. Order anything you can think of. Let's surprise them. Will you each kindly draw up your own menu?'

'Anything,' said Mr. Sheringham, with a sigh, 'will do for me.'

'Nonsense. Waiter, kindly advise this gentleman.'

'A chop and a rice pudding,' remarked Mr. Sheringham, with a grim smile.

'What would you say to a few oysters?' insinuated the waiter.

Mr. Sheringham shrugged his shoulders.

'Oysters, sir? Thank you. Then a little turtle soup, and what to follow? Do you like your sole Colbert or Mornay?'

'Toss up,' said Mr. Sheringham, bitterly.

'Mornay, I think, sir. And after that——?'

'I recommend *Bordure de Crème de Jambon aux Prunes*,' put in Sir Daniel, whose attendant waiter could scarcely scribble fast enough.

'I won't argue,' replied Mr. Sheringham, but noticeably less Byronic, 'if it isn't that, it's something else.'

'*Tornedos à la Drexel* are on the menu to-night, sir. Thank you. Then, of course, roast grouse to follow. And now a sweet. Something light, I imagine.'

'Permit me,' broke in George Andrews, 'I think I can advise this gentleman. I have made a particular study of sweets. I am having nothing but sweets myself. So is Miss Henniker. Now what we want—I think I can say we all want—'

'*Lartances d'Harengs aux Champignons*,' Sir Daniel was repeating with reverence.

'I would advise,' proceeded George Andrews, 'an *Omelette Soufflé en Surprise* as a pleasant and reliable sweet, to be followed by *Pyramide d'Abricots à la Maintenon*, and a large *Bombe Glacée à la Vénitienne*. How would that do, Mr. Sheringham?'

He summoned up a reply.

'So long,' he said submissively, 'as I can have my savoury—anchovy, cheese-straws, or anything at all—I am content. Don't consider me, please.'

'And now, Miss Pendlebury,' said George Andrews, 'where is your dinner?'

Aunt Babette shook her head.

'Oh, I couldn't,' she expostulated. 'I am accustomed to a poached egg.'

Sir Daniel rushed to her protection.

'Miss Pendlebury,' he said gallantly, 'is under my wing,' and to prove it ordered immediately a sound champagne.

These minor but inevitable duties faced and overcome, they went in to dinner. Sir Daniel, having played with the outposts of hors-d'œuvres and clear soup, tossed off his second glass of sherry, regarded Miss Pendlebury's *Eperlans Frits* with critical approval, and from casual pleasantries began to break ground in earnest.

'Of course I know your sister,' he said, twisting his empty champagne glass suggestively. 'I refer to Mrs. Henniker.'

'Now leave my dear Margaret alone,' said Aunt Babette, 'I won't allow you to make fun of her.'

'My dear lady,' expostulated Sir Daniel, 'you're joking.'

'Well, don't spoil the dinner. I can't help my relations. It isn't everybody lives under the shadow of D. P.'

Sir Daniel fully sympathised with the appeal. He thought Aunt Babette extraordinarily sensible. He wished Babette could have five minutes with his sister-in-law.

'How did you get on?' Daphne asked.

Mr. Sheringham was waiting for that very question. He wished it had come before the ham with prunes. But he crushed his unfortunate tendency to sentimental comedy. He gave her a ferocious glance.

'I saw my publisher,' he said, and drank a glass of champagne as though it were a light, but efficient poison.

George Andrews, who was gorging a substantial sweet with every indication of satisfaction, eyed him attentively. He would have spoken if he could.

'I hope he bucked you up,' inquired Daphne.

'Bucked me up,' echoed Mr. Sheringham, and gave her a priceless glance. It said unmistakably 'I am struggling with an emotion cloaked heroically by these *Tornedos à la Drexel*.'

'I'm sorry,' said Daphne.

'Thank you, Miss Henniker. Please don't let me cast a cloud over the evening. Just let me steal away,' he added, watching the waiter carve a slice of grouse. 'I know you'll understand. It isn't the books. It's something more than that.'

To prevent Mr. Sheringham proposing over the *Omelette Soufflé en Surprise*, or explaining how impossible any idea of marriage could ever be for such as he, Daphne turned to George Andrews and hastily pressed upon him a fondant.

Sir Daniel in the meantime had progressed not merely in sustenance but from cordiality to lingering reminiscent sentiment. He had mentioned the death of his wife ten years ago, and sighed. He had touched upon his sister-in-law, Caroline, and sighed again. He was anxious, for some remote reason, that Miss Pendlebury should know all. He was charmed and touched by the sympathetic interest she displayed. From the *Bordure de Crème de Jambon aux Prunes*, which was his first real departure, right on to the *Bombe Glacée à la Vénitienne*, which he found very harrowing, she listened in the right kind of silence. He had no idea that any woman could understand him so well.

But it was over the port that he excelled himself.

'I live in the country, Miss Pendlebury. A very quiet life. Are you fond of the country?'

'Devoted. I have a cottage in the New Forest.'

'How curious,' murmured Sir Daniel pensively, 'that we should both live in the country.'

'Why not write books that sell?' asked George Andrews from the other end of the table.

Mr. Sheringham recoiled. No author likes that kind of thing.

'Exactly,' he said with irony. 'Cumbermere is equally curious.'

'What is the best market?'

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'Apparently strong realistic stories. About one's own sad past.'

'I know,' cried Daphne brightly.

'Well, Miss Henniker?'

'Write about Warrenders and father and Mr. Huntingdon.'

George Andrews was eating *Pyramide d'Abricots à la Maintenon* at the moment. But he broke away.

'Miss Henniker is right,' he said, 'quite right. If you produce a book about Warrenders, the real Warrenders, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll *make* it sell.'

Mr. Sheringham started. He had not thought of that. What better? A fine, strong, dauntless study. Remorseless. Pitiless.

'Shall I?' he asked Daphne.

'Rather. I say, won't they kick up a row, though?'

'Probably, but if the book sells it won't matter. If it's a failure——'

'It won't be a failure,' said George Andrews; 'if it costs a thousand pounds I'll make it hum.'

'What's that about a thousand?' Sir Daniel begged to know facetiously.

'Mr. Sheringham,' explained Daphne, 'is going to write a book about Warrenders.'

'Then here's to it,' said Sir Daniel, and raised a glass of Cockburn.

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'This must be an absolute secret,' warned Daphne. 'Nobody must suspect. We are all in it, sink or swim.'

'Sink or swim,' chanted Sir Daniel.

In the pause that followed the launching of that tremendous enterprise George Andrews laid down his fork and spoon. He was exceedingly pale.

'Hello!' said Mr. Sheringham.

'I am feeling far from comfortable,' said George Andrews.

III

Mrs. Henniker did not devote her evening to the fourth volume of the parliamentary career of the great Mr. Pendlebury. There are times in the affairs of individuals, as in empires, when progress must be laid aside, and revolution met and vanquished. During dinner she said nothing that in the least degree touched upon the tragedy. She even partook of a little chicken. But after dinner she said a great deal. She stood in front of the library fire and addressed her husband like a public meeting.

'We must not forget that Daphne begged us not to worry. She says so in her note,' soothed Dr. Henniker.

'We are not worrying, Francis. I think I may truthfully say I have never worried in my life. But I am dissatisfied. Firstly I think Daphne should conquer this tendency to scribble notes. I recollect her Aunt Babette——'

'Oh,' groaned Dr. Henniker eloquently.

'——fretted her father profoundly by similar irresponsibility. I found him one evening sitting before his desk staring at a blank sheet of paper. He gave one significant look. "Is it the Balkans?" I asked—I was twelve at the time. "No," he replied, "*Babette.*"'

Her husband, who was acquainted with the anecdote, bowed his head.

'It is only a few nights since that undesirable function at the Lion. I have, as you know, made no reference to an occasion that can only be regarded as personal to myself. Had Mr. Denver any light to throw upon this new boy Humphries?'

Dr. Henniker stirred and hesitated.

'He is so sensitive. I could only touch on the matter. He is of the opinion that Humphries is delicate and backward. When Denver gets an idea of that kind into his head, he is hopeless—most difficult. Of course, if I have any further grounds for interference, I will press the matter.'

'That, however, is beside the point. I think the time has come to deal firmly with Daphne. It will

be a moral struggle. She must be made to understand that, while she is dependent upon us, she must submit to our judgment and guidance. There is every hope that she will realise what a serious thing life is, and how important it is to think, and read, and prepare for the future. Which reminds me. I am informed that Daphne is too friendly with Mr. Sheringham. Is that desirable? Emphatically not.'

'I do not dislike Sheringham,' replied Dr. Henniker, 'but he only took a second in Classics——'

'Exactly. With your approval I will speak to Daphne. One reason why Babette never made a suitable marriage was her disposition to know the most ineligible and foolish young men. It is amazing how frequently Daphne reminds me of my poor sister.'

'I am thankful they have not met in recent years,' sighed Dr. Henniker.

'Such an idea is unthinkable.'

It was at that lively statement that the door was flung open and Daphne, rosy, laughing, and altogether prepossessing, rushed in.

'Here you are,' she cried, 'Now, where do you think I've been? I'll give you one guess each.'

Mrs. Henniker relinquished her claim.

'London!' said Daphne. '*In a motor.*'

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Dr. Henniker went cold.

'Might I ask with whom?' he asked, in a strained voice.

'Humphries, father. You know Humphries?'

Yes, Dr. Henniker evidently knew Humphries.

'To London,' he repeated aghast.

'Without a chaperon,' thundered Mrs. Henniker. That was the climax awaited by Daphne.

'Come in, chaperon,' she called.

The room grew suddenly Arctic, as though the shade of the late David Pendlebury had fled up the chimney. Then, upon the threshold, in a motor bonnet, and looking about thirty, appeared the regrettable Aunt Babette.

CHAPTER IX

I

It was upon the next morning that Mr. Sheringham sent for George Andrews.

'Look here,' he said, 'I want a word with you.'

'Certainly; though I am still indisposed.'

'Sit down, then. First of all I want to warn you.'

'Oh?'

'I have just come from Mr. Denver. He is a dear old soul, but hysterical. Now, Dr. Henniker has been talking. About you.'

'Well?'

'I don't think you quite grasp how serious this might be.'

'Mr. Denver knows how I am situated. He may not have said so to you, but——'

'I'm perfectly certain he has never given you a thought.'

'I simply cannot credit it.'

Mr. Sheringham stared gloomily out of the window.

'For goodness sake,' he broke out, 'don't go

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about asking for trouble. Conform to the recognised customs. It's lucky for you that you are to be in my form. I must beg of you to respect my authority. Otherwise you will simply get into hot water.'

'What would you do?'

The House tutor went to a cupboard and drew out a pliable traditional instrument.

'This,' he said firmly.

George Andrews shrugged his shoulders.

'All right. What am I to do?'

'First of all call me "Sir."'

George Andrews noted it under 'A.'

'What sort of work do you teach?'

'Greek and Latin principally.'

'Don't know any. Tell me what is the use of them?'

'They develop the mind.'

'Better than any other form of study?'

'I can't say.'

'Are they any practical service afterwards?'

'To the professions—certainly.'

'That's about 25 per cent. of the school, I suppose?'

'Possibly.'

'So 75 per cent. learn nothing, to give a leg up to the other 25 per cent. Is there any sense in that? Is there any use learning any mortal thing

that has no place in your working value? Certainly not.'

'Efficiency is not everything,' said Mr. Sheringham. 'You will find that out sooner or later.'

'I entirely disagree. But I appreciate your point. I will conform to the system until I have laid my plans. Then I will scrap it.'

'It will not be so easy as you imagine.'

'Where is the difficulty? It will not bear criticism or examination. It is based simply upon tradition and conformity. Nothing is permanent in the world.'

Mr. Sheringham shook his head and patted George Andrews upon the shoulder in quite a paternal fashion.

'Wait,' he said, 'wait a little.'

II

Denver's came to the conclusion that George Andrews had subsided, while his appearance in the Lower Third strengthened the view that the payment of ten shillings to Wingate was a national scandal. But there was one in Denver's who was not deceived. That was Richardson, the detective. In association with that distinguished person was

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the invaluable Potter, an understudy of Dr. Watson. He was paid a shilling a term to express the ejaculations, fatuous curiosity, and abundant surprise so stimulating to an artist. Potter mastered hardly any of these emotions, but he did his best. Few would have grudged him his shilling.

It was the day following the return of George Andrews that Richardson made his way to Wingate's study, returned twice upon his tracks, and, without knocking, turned the handle swiftly and gave Wingate a considerable start. That accomplished satisfactorily, he went over to the fire, sat down, and, drawing a mysterious paper from his pocket, stared at it without a word.

Wingate, who tolerated a great deal for the scraps of information Richardson occasionally derived by the most arduous and unnatural means, went on working. Even the murder of Withers could not have eased the complexities of Latin verse, and he was not a ready thinker.

'Perhaps,' remarked Richardson, who wore spectacles and was in the Upper Fourth, 'perhaps this paper conveys nothing to you.'

Wingate took it reluctantly, stared at the words: 'Kindly make Mr. Plugg and Mr. Barney comfortable,' and shook his head. It left him cold.

'I thought you wouldn't fall to it,' said

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Richardson, not without complacency. He leaned further back in the chair, carefully returned the paper to his pocket, and threw out a clue.

'This is Humphries' writing. Don't ask how I discovered it. Now, who are Mr. Plugg and Mr. Barney, and why and where should they be made comfortable? Everything hangs on that.'

'Haven't an idea,' grunted Wingate from the table. 'Uncles, I expect. Come to say good-bye,' he added, with a slow grin.

The great detective rose, and crossing to the door, opened it softly, poked his head out, and returned.

'They are not uncles,' he said, in a tone that even Wingate could not ignore, 'they are *pugilists*.'

That was the end of Latin verse.

'I warned you,' resumed Richardson, after a dramatic pause, 'I warned you that something strange was on foot. Why did Humphries motor to London the day after the challenge?'

'Motor?'

'I repeat it—motor. Why did he book rooms at the Lion? Why is he out in running shorts at five in the morning and in bed at nine?'

'How can I know?'

The famous detective smiled.

'Because, my dear Wingate, he is *in training*!'

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'In training. For what?'

'To fight you.'

'Rot!'

'If you like. Call it anything you like. Perhaps you'll say I'm a liar.'

'No, but—— Look here——' But Richardson had gone.

Wingate rose and went over to the window. Then, being the only son of John Wingate, the Radical M.P., he was satisfied there was nothing in it, and settled down.

It was two hours later that Bentham, whose hatred for Wingate was a deep and steady growth, entered the room.

'I say.'

'Hello!'

'That fellow Humphries.'

'Oh, damn Humphries!'

'He's been seen in the Lion talking to two strangers up from London. Withers was with them.'

'Well?'

'Marshall has recognised one of the men as Plugg, the middle-weight.'

Plugg? Richardson had said a name like Plugg.

'Is he a boxer?'

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'My dear man, *the* boxer—'. His eyes were focused stealthily on the other.

'Rot!' said Wingate faintly.

In this insidious fashion a steady trickle of news reached his study day by day. Someone had seen Humphries running a mile outside the village, forming well to all accounts. Someone else had heard him at punch-ball in Mr. Sheringham's room. It was stated that he was Plugg's younger brother. The air was full of rumour and counter-rumour. And still Wingate held out. He refused to have an hour daily with the gloves, he scorned to pretend that he was not fit as a fiddle. The idea that Humphries could be in charge of the renowned pugilists was preposterous. It was merely idiotic. But to Denver's, hungry for their money's worth, the tidings were wonderful, making Bats and Owls flock together.

Finally, a week before the event, something of the appalling truth was revealed, it is unnecessary to state, by Richardson. Upon a certain evening he confronted Wingate. He tore off his false moustache and slouch hat, which, for the sake of honourable tradition, he had assumed in the passage outside, he shrugged his shoulders, and then, with a tragic laugh, threw himself in a chair.

'That's right,' growled Wingate morosely, 'kick the things about.'

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'I know all,' remarked the great detective.

'You always do—after everybody else.'

'My dear fellow, the game's up.'

'What game?'

'Listen. To-day, as I was walking down Windsor Lane, I saw a large grey car. Inside were the two men from the Inn. They were waiting for Humphries. Perceiving this, I took my life in my hands and crept on to the luggage-rack at the back. Humphries jumped in, drove the car——'

'Drove the——'

'It is his car. He keeps it at the Lion. He has a chauffeur.'

From that moment Wingate knew fear.

'Drove the car along the road to Clipton. About half a mile out there is a tent, a pavilion in a field off the road. That's where they train.'

'Who train? Go on, you silly ass.'

'Plugg, Barney, and Humphries. There is a running track, an obstacle race, and inside the tent a ring——'

'A what?'

The detective nodded twice. 'For fighting,' he said with relish. 'A real swagger ring raised on boards; ropes—everything.'

Wingate grew smaller. His collar choked him. He was paralysed with interest.

'I watched under the canvas and d'you know Humphries took on Plugg and——'

At that moment the door opened and Withers looked in. 'scuse me, sir,' he said, 'but Master Humphries asked me to leave this note, and would you like hand-bills distributed in the town, or the usual sandwich men, and the ads. in the local press. I hope, sir, you're coming along nicely. Master Humphries has surprised us all. His punch, sir—it's quite a poem.'

Upon the closing of the door Wingate opened the envelope. In a brief dictated letter Humphries informed him that, in view of the fact that many friends and members of the press and fancy—in particular Mr. Hulk, the great boxing referee—were coming down from London, he would be obliged if the contest, 'the best of twenty rounds,' should commence not later than eight o'clock. There was more in the same strain, but Wingate was satisfied he had read sufficient. He felt far from well. He had a sudden moving memory of his mother wishing him good night long, long ago.



CHAPTER X

I

UPON the night of the great fight the Reverend Henry Denver departed for the estimable purpose of dining with the Head. He was of the opinion, shared by his host, that Dr. Henniker was a free agent in the matter. Not at all. It had been deputed to Daphne to manage, by hook or crook, that Mr. Denver should have an alibi. It was felt that, in view of the proceedings of the evening, he should run no risk, but should be reserved for a more critical hour. The mingled courtesy and forethought of such an arrangement would have interested Mr. Denver. It opened up a new field in the relations of masters and boys.

Immediately following his departure the House awoke to great activity. Particularly Mr. Sheringham. He acted in a way that could only be censured and deplored in one holding authority. He left his post. He deserted the bridge. He became in half an hour the most popular House tutor in the traditions of Denver's.

So far gone was he in crime that he never paused to consider his betrayal; he never faltered. He

simply flung on a hat and coat, rushed downstairs, out into the yard, and jumped into a car that, one fears, was there for that very purpose. He even chuckled, which was probably bravado. Then an amazing episode occurred. In a very few minutes the motor drew up outside Dr. Henniker's house. Mr. Sheringham leaped down, and, opening a side gate, disappeared into the garden. Moving quickly across the lawn, he reached the shrubbery. He fumbled about a moment, and exposed a ladder. This he carried to Dr. Henniker's house. Burglary? No; Daphne.

It was felt to be so unlikely that Dr. and Mrs. Henniker would enter into the spirit of the evening that every precaution had been taken to save them pain. The ladder was Daphne's idea. It seemed to her both practical and romantic, and it is so seldom one can harmonise the two. To Mr. Sheringham the idea had been a shock. It was absolutely foreign to the Harold Whippet school. Unless the ladder broke, which was not to be desired, the incident was sentimental. Still, the sentimental was so admirable—— Mr. Sheringham went up the ladder. He uttered a low, romantic whistle. There was a moment of paralysing silence, during which he expected the accusing figure of Mrs. Henniker to sweep aside the curtains. It passed and left Daphne leaning downwards.

'They are in the drawing-room,' she whispered.

'Then come quickly.'

'But how?'

Mr. Sheringham climbed higher. He began to understand the fascination of a fireman's life.

'First, climb over the balcony.'

Having uttered these words he trembled, and stared over his shoulder.

'What next, please?'

She was over, standing above him. He could smell the perfume on her dress.

'Quickly.'

'Now catch hold of my shoulders and place your foot on a rung.'

That accomplished, Daphne—who had frequently reached ground by the easy and adequate method of swarming down the water-pipe—permitted Mr. Sheringham to guide and advise her every footfall, in a manner exceedingly docile. And at the level, Mr. Sheringham persisted in catching her in his arms, being by that time in a very highly-strung condition. But Daphne released herself, and cautioned him. Upon the blind behind them was silhouetted, like an avenging angel, the figure of Mrs. Henniker.

'Come,' said Mr. Sheringham, instantly cowed, 'here, take my hand.'

They fled like frightened children over the grass,

through the gate and into the car, which, in the course of a few minutes, was out of sight. Only the ladder remained, the indifferent colleague in this mysterious affair. As for the car, it drew up at the Lion, and Aunt Babette, strictly incognito for the night, got in. A few minutes later they reached the station. It is unnecessary to state who stepped out of the London train.

'On no account must Charles Lucifer see me,' said the last arrival anxiously.

The conspirators had gathered.

II

Throughout the brilliantly-lighted tent were rows of seats, row upon row. They were already packed. To begin with, the juniors of Denver's—the Bats and Owls—were there in a body. Little Wilfred Hammond, who should have known better, was making a book on the event, and being taken freely at odds on Wingate. As he was already insolvent, his horizon was bounded by Humphries. He would either be a capitalist or perish. As for Denver's, their attitude was not obscure. They had paid their money to Wingate and they came in a spirit of expectation. Beyond the legitimate spirit of anticipation they struggled manfully to

conceal their amazement at the whole business. There was the tent. There was also the ring. And in the ring moved about a large distinguished gentleman, a model public man (a substantial Mr. Pendlebury), wearing evening clothes, and consulting from time to time a handsome gold watch in his hand. That was sufficiently disturbing, but there was also a party of professional people from London, patrons of the Fancy, displaying large, experienced, clean-shaven faces, enormous ties, absurd short coats, and flourishing little pocket-books. There was also a reserved portion, filled apparently with rustics and townspeople. Denver's made nothing of these. A box, heavily shrouded in curtains, was apparently unoccupied. Under this box was seated Charles Lucifer and his friend Dugmore, the latest Dugmore.

It was all very dazzling, and certainly there was one individual who was struck by these things, and heard boys shouting 'chocolates' as though it were a circus, and caught the excited murmur of the crowd, and knew that the future was indescribable. That was Wingate. He sat in his canvas dressing-room, upon the extreme edge of his chair, arrayed in disconsolate running togs; staring dismally at his seconds, Tom Bowlby and Dick Spender, whose feeble efforts at professional by-play would have made a strong man cry.

'It's nearly time,' said Tom, 'buck up, Wing.'

Most unhappily the dressing-room of the other candidate was only a sheet of canvas apart. It was quite impossible not to hear what was said.

'Go easy with your right, sir,' advised a gruff voice. 'Don't knock him about at once. Remember people 'ave paid their money to see a bit o' sport. That's wot I alwus says.'

'Knock him about,' gulped Wingate. 'What's he mean, Tom?'

'Buck up, Wing,' whispered Dick Spender hoarsely, and instantly added to Bowlby as a further inducement to high spirits. 'I say, what do we do when his nose bleeds? Did you see all those strangers, Tom? I'm beastly shivery.'

'Plugg,' resumed the gruff voice again, 'give 'im a nice rub over, will yer. It's cold 'ere.' Then, as if to a critical and competent group: 'Perfect condition. Not an ounce of superfluid fat. It'll be a walk-over—mark my words; 'e'll play with 'im like 'e did with the "Little Goshawk." You remember, Tony?'

'Little Goshawk!' repeated Wingate, with feeling.

'An' a nahsty 'eart punch 'e 'ad, too,' put in Mr. Barney. 'Of course that was a pro match, not a namatoor.'

'Dick,' said Wingate, in a hollow voice,

'couldn't we sit outside. This place is draughty, isn't it? I suppose there's no fear Denny will stop it at the last minute.'

'Not a ghostly. You have a clear hour, Wing.'

The hope of Denver's received the good tidings in a thoughtful silence.

'I saw "the Kennington Canary" come in just now,' continued the conversational Mr. Plugg, 'there's a featherweight for you. Considerin' 'ow you mauled 'im at the Ring a month ago, Master 'umphries, I admire 'is spirit.'

'That must have been when he motored to London,' said Tom Bowlby, with unpardonable cleverness.

'Did you get a bit on, sir?' pursued Mr. Plugg. There was a pause, and Wingate pirouetted his chair an inch nearer the canvas partition.

The reply of George Andrews was cool and indifferent: 'Only a hundred guineas.'

'My God!' moaned Wingate, and, losing his balance, clutched wildly at Bowlby, and was reduced to the floor.

It was at that regrettable moment that the tremendous stranger in evening clothes popped in his head, the massive gold watch grasped like an instrument of defence in his right palm.

'Better get your man ready,' he said briskly, addressing Dick Spender, who was fourteen and

small for his age. The Denver seconds exchanged a glance of mutual terror, then turned upon the victim.

'Hurry up, Wing. Let's get it over.'

Catastrophe lurked in the air before they left the seclusion of the dressing-room. It haunted their belated appearance before an impatient audience. A burst of cheering rose, and was overtaken by a smothered roar of laughter. Climbing nervously over the ropes, Wingate was aware that about two hundred persons were giving him their entire attention, particularly a representative gathering of his father's constituents, specially invited by the forethought of George Andrews. To enable every spectator to decide, audibly or merely by a shake of the head, his unbiassed view of Wingate's chances, there followed a long torturing pause. It was a pause carefully, mathematically, scientifically gauged. It was part of the game. It was a psychological pause. It reduced Wingate to neurasthenia.

And at that very moment, in the other dressing-room, Jim Plugg remarked to Tony Barney, in a cool, dispassionate tone: 'We've done our level, Tony—an' never have I taken part in such a stiff proposition—*never*. Wot I says is money nor pains carnt do more. They say young Wingate's a quick starter for a namatoor. Let 'im start, 'e'll

start too late. I'd like to see 'im with my heye glued to 'im—with Jim Plugg's optic a-tellin' 'im, a-shoutin' at 'im, that he's up against something warm. It's corst a cool hundred apiece, but it's been worth it, me lad. I'll dream of this in years to come ! '

The appearance of George Andrews brought a sudden termination to this vital dialogue, for suddenly, before the audience were fully alive to the wonderful thing that had happened, a band (brilliantly concealed) struck up one fine resounding chord, a conquering note, and the figure of George Andrews, in a gorgeous dressing-gown, accompanied by his illustrious seconds, vaulted lightly over the ropes, and the most distinguished of London referees, the eminent Mr. Hulk, prepared to introduce the combatants.

'Gentlemen,' he shouted through a megaphone, when the band had knocked under, 'Gentlemen,' with a gesture, 'Wingate, the present holder of the Denver light-weight championship' (inadequate applause, in which the London party did not join) 'and in the other corner, George Andrews Humphries, the famous and unbeaten candidate, together with his world-renowned trainers, Jim Plugg, "the Mile-End Wonder," and Tony Barney, "the Pride of Putney," whose proud boast it is that they have never trained a loser.'

At these sensational words the band repeated its deafening chord, the audience shouted itself hoarse, and a gong began to ring. The clamour died down, the referee drew back to the ropes, the seconds whisked away, the ring was clear.

'Go it, Wing,' sang out a solitary, but tremulous supporter.

'Silence there!' remonstrated Sir Daniel, from the shadows of the box.

Wingate didn't go it. He was wondering where George Andrews would hit him most. He felt the eyes of the great Plugg eating into him. But nothing happened. George Andrews simply danced about, wearing a singularly irritating smile. It worried Wingate, who had not smiled for days.

'Let 'im 'it yer once, Humphries,' cried a husky, derisive voice instantly hushed. The gong sounded, altogether an ominous and disconcerting sound. The second was no more satisfactory.

'Rush him, Wing,' appealed the same isolated voice, and, full of justifiable disgust, Sir Daniel bounced an indignant head over the box, and, aware of Charles Lucifer, bounced back again.

Wingate was notoriously at his best in attack. He moved irresolutely forward, George Andrews yielded, and the interest, the expectation of the audience quickened. But suddenly Wingate swung back. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen

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Plugg wink at Barney. He was playing into their hands. George Andrews, who had mauled the 'Kennington Canary' so decisively, was leading him into a trap.

Out of the stillness the gong rang.

'No 'eart there,' remarked the proprietor of the Lion audibly, jerking his thumb at Wingate.

'He's held out two rounds,' retorted one of the London party, 'he's done a round better than the Goshawk.'

'That's the ticket, sir,' whispered Jim Plugg to George Andrews, 'you're a-winnin' 'ands down. See 'im shy then. 'e's a-sweatin' terrible.'

'Shall I hit him?' asked George Andrews.

'Gawd forbid,' returned the great man piously, 'up you get, sir.'

'Buck up, Wing,' encouraged Tom Bowlby.

But Wingate only shook his head. He was waiting for something that never came, and he was feeling the strain. In the third round he managed to get home on George Andrews' cheek, and instantly leaped back for fear of what would follow. But George Andrews only smiled. He had signed an agreement to smile. He had practised that smile for hours on end.

Wingate, breathing heavily, lurched forward again. Sweat was pouring down his chest, his eyes were dim with it. Through a haze he came

cautiously after George Andrews. Suddenly he cornered him against the ropes. He let out with his left, swung off his balance, and fell. Even George Andrews was uncertain at that moment whether he had hit him or not. As for the audience, it yelled itself hoarse. Wingate staggered to his feet. He stood, with heaving chest, glaring sullenly about him.

Then the gong went.

There followed a spirited, a dramatic conference between Mr. Plugg and George Andrews.

'Wait, sir,' counselled the great man, 'a child could give 'im the knock-out in three rounds.'

'But I'm not a child, and I rather like this.'

'I wouldn't, sir. It's not fair on me and Tony.'

'You mean if I lose? Well, I won't lose. I never lose anything, not even fighting. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll pay you winning stakes.'

'Puttin' it so handsomely, sir,' pondered Mr. Plugg, 'I'd let 'im come away with 'is left, duck, and, when 'e follers with 'is right, clip 'im fust on the 'eart to steady 'im, find 'is jaw, an' play on the kidneys as a finisher.'

After that things quickened considerably. Wingate was out to finish the business. He had a solitary ideal—to catch George Andrews one good one before he went down. In the private box Mr. Sheringham and Sir Daniel watched the final

stages with the enthralled gaze of men sighting a land of promise; while Daphne and Aunt Babette clung together, and united a little screech at every blow. Mr. Sheringham was so carried away by it all that he forgot Mr. Denver dining placidly with the Head, at that very moment congratulating him upon the sobriety, the good tone, the example of his House.

So everybody was pleased.

'Hello!' said Sir Daniel, 'look at our man.'

There followed a round that produced quite a scene amongst the London party. George Andrews met Wingate half way, took a heavy punch on the right eye, blundered with his left, and ducked away clumsily. The opening of the offensive turned Plugg sick. It was enough to make the imaginary 'Canary' take wing. Then quite suddenly George Andrews lost his temper. Wingate was flaying the air with tired arms. He watched George Andrews coming nearer. Throughout the place was an absolute deathlike stillness. George Andrews was within three feet, crouching, his enormous head lowered, his strange, calculating eyes narrowed.

And then his smile disappeared. It closed down for the evening, and Wingate knew he was done. He made an indecisive step backward, shot out his left, and heard rather than felt a thud over his heart. George Andrews missed the jaw, but he did

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some in-fighting that surprised them all. The end came swiftly. Tottering back, Wingate summoned up his strength, caught the great democrat a splendid one on the nose, and collapsed.

The famous fight was over, and Wingate, the hope of Denver's, had been beaten to a standstill by a tent, a band, a fat referee, two conscienceless pugilists, and a smile. Slowly he staggered upon his feet, shook hands with George Andrews, and climbed off the platform. Someone raised a cry: 'Three cheers for Humphries,' and Denver's gave it strong. They cheered themselves hoarse, and when the racket died away, Mr. Sheringham, from the box, howled in the silence: 'What of Mr. Plugg and Mr. Barney,' thus establishing for ever his unquestionable sympathy with an occasion that would have caused Mr. Denver the deepest horror and dismay.

Shortly afterwards, George Andrews, attired in his gorgeous dressing-gown, and supported by the complacent figures of Mr. Plugg and Mr. Barney, bowed his acknowledgments to a frenzied gathering, and stood with a hand uplifted for silence.

'I will be obliged,' he said, 'if members of the general public will adjourn to the adjoining tent, where light refreshments are provided.'

The general public rose as one man.

A little dismayed and covetous, the juniors of Denver's watched them surging out of sight, and knew that the triumphal progress of the occasion was nearing a crisis.

'And now, gentlemen,' resumed George Andrews, briskly, 'to the business of the evening. The earlier proceedings have, I hope, afforded you some relaxation.' (It was at those crisp words that Wingate rose and returned to Denver's.) 'But we want more in life than amusement. We want, shall I say, *money*.'

Sir Daniel, who had been leaning forward with complete attention, started violently, nodded his head several times, and said 'hear hear,' with feeling.

'I repeat—money. It is at the base of all commercial enterprise, and commercial enterprise is, in its turn, at the base of national security. Therefore, money and the making of money is a duty—a side of patriotism scarcely recognised in Warrenders. It is my desire to train you, to encourage you, to adapt your potentialities so that you will each be self-supporting before you wear stand-up collars.'

'Hear, hear,' rang out the rich accord of Sir Daniel.

'What is all this about?'

The Bats and Owls stirred guiltily. They were

gravelled. They liked the idea of it, but they knew now Humphries was off his chump. They admired him, they would never forget the knock-out blow; but they wished, for the credit of Denver's, that he wouldn't talk bosh.

'You don't know?'

George Andrews turned to Mr. Plugg and Mr. Barney and made a gesture. Instantly those two superb figures—who received cheques, and, however hard the struggle, exhibited no emotion whatever—unfolded an immense white screen upon which was written: 'The Democratic Progressive Mutual Benefit Society.'

'You ask,' repeated George Andrews, after a dramatic pause, 'what all this is about? I will tell you. It is a new company to be launched immediately to develop the resources of Denver's. It is, you will be interested to learn, the first commercial undertaking of the character founded in any public school. And this evening, as a preliminary bonus, so to speak, every junior here will receive gratis a share, par value one shilling. Upon Wednesday the market will have touched a point sufficiently high to enable you to sell out to me at two shillings. Does that interest you?'

'No,' shouted a voice.

There was an extraordinary sensation at that defiant denial. Even the great democrat started,

and appeared to lose composure; while the pugilists, confident that they had mastered surprise at anything, burst into perspiration.

But George Andrews had the experience and instinct of a weather-beaten company promoter. He was suddenly stricken deaf.

‘Or, if any junior holds over until Friday he will receive something between three shillings and five—a trifle, but an indication of the prospective capacities of the society. Do you want five shillings for nothing?’

‘No,’ shouted the same inflamed voice.

‘Perhaps the speaker will explain.’

‘We don’t want your money, nor you, nor your society.’

At those ringing words many a father would have said in broken accents: ‘God bless my boy. He remembers the name he bears.’

But Sir Daniel only groaned. He realised that in Charles Lucifer he had nurtured a hero, a Berkshire Croome and a strong silent Englishman, and he shrank from such renown. He would have been content with quite an ordinary boy, one who could be guided and directed for the best.

Beside Charles Lucifer was Dugmore, evidently also inspired by a righteous indignation that would have greatly interested his father. George Andrews whispered something to Mr. Plugg and Mr.

Barney; there was a moment or two of scuffling, a chair was knocked over, and the backwoodsmen were removed. For an avowed democrat George Andrews had acted with remarkable and ominous decision.

'I put it to this meeting. Are there any supporters of the gentlemen recently with us?'

The pugilists stood ready, looking up and down.

'Will those in favour of the society make a show of hands? Thank you.'

The resolution was carried unanimously.

'The share certificates are upon this table. You will each receive one as you file out. I hope you will take supper before you return.'

The juniors took both.

In the empty tent Sir Daniel rushed upon George Andrews.

'My dear fellow,' he said, 'you are splendid.'

George Andrews was not so certain.

'It cost five hundred all told,' he remarked.

'And you are satisfied?'

'No.'

'Who are you afraid of? Mr. Denver? Dr. Henniker? Warrenders?'

George Andrews shook his head emphatically at each in turn.

'Charles Lucifer,' he replied.

CHAPTER XI

I

DURING the next few days the juniors tasted the richness of life. They were men of means. The bloods, prefects, and other remote persons, perceiving an unmistakable air of opulence haunting Richards' tuck-shop and swaggering about the town, took thought and saw no light. Even Charles Lucifer flinched from unveiling something of the awful truth, and, had it not been for Richardson, whose business it was to know a little about everything, it is difficult to say how long the secret might not have been kept. Upon that afternoon when the spectacle of Birkin, Whishart, Seeley, and Cohen driving to the footer ground in an open conveyance had taken Warrenders by the throat, he pounced upon Potter, his immature colleague.

'This Humphries,' he remarked: 'What do you make of him?'

Potter took no interest in psychology. He had marvelled at the prize-fight, pocketed his share capital like a man, and passed on. He had, if anything, a kindly feeling for Humphries.

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'Perhaps it may cause you surprise,' continued the great detective, 'to learn that Humphries has arranged to dine four at the Lion to-night.'

'Four what?' asked Potter.

'My dear ass—what d'you think? The point is this: Why is Humphries dining at the Lion?'

'Why, Richardson?' Nothing could exceed the childlike candour and modesty of Potter. For at least one admirable reason the famous criminologist refrained from answering. But he did what he could.

'After prep,' he said quietly, 'you will attend this dinner.'

At those manly words the mental fatigue of association with a notoriety left Potter. The whole affair became suddenly absorbing.

'But I'm not asked.'

'I know. This is a situation calling for coolness, resource, and iron nerve,' resumed Richardson, naming impressively qualities peculiarly absent in his colleague. 'I am confident that you will pull it off. I envy you, Potter. If it succeeds it will be a tremendous *coup*. If it fails, if you are discovered—good luck, old chap.'

'But I say,' broke in Potter, plaintively.

'Not a word—enough has passed between us already. To-night, when the second course goes in, slip behind the waiter and so under the table.'

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There is, I presume, a table. If not slip somewhere. It should be child's play to a man of your experience. You will hear strange things to-night.'

'What about?'

'Exactly—what about? What is this new society that is to be launched? There are several who'd give a bit to know. I'd hand over a tanner myself.'

'Then you go,' pressed Potter warmly.

'Impossible.'

There was a momentary pause.

'Where will *you* be?' gulped the victim, struggling unsuccessfully with a base suspicion.

'Where you least expect me,' retorted the detective, and, in accordance with the best traditions of his profession, was seen no more.

II

If there were four unpopular figures in Denver's they were Smallwood, Cohen, James, and Massey. Smallwood was tall and emaciated; Cohen was thirteen and stout; James, the son of a Radical M.P., was dark and sinuous; and Massey, like nothing except himself. The fathers of all these gentlemen were renowned, but not revered, in the

world of commerce—it was the bond that linked their offspring together. Beyond that they each had scored their individual triumphs. Smallwood had launched the great postage-stamp swindle; Cohen lent anything up to sixpence, at an Eastern profit; the reputation of James, like older politicians, was steadily growing; while Massey treated the truth like a junior.

All these gentlemen displeased Denver's. In after life they caused even stronger emotions. But limited as their sphere was at Warrenders, they worked it, in their small way, efficiently. They suffered taunts and even blows with patience; they avoided exercise with quiet heroism; and in moments of calm they turned to the ancient pastime of beggar-my-neighbour. They were like the leading arguments of advanced educationalists. They were a vision of the future. But as pioneers of commercial education they were misunderstood.

It was in respect for the sterling qualities of these gentlemen that George Andrews invited them to dinner. He had every hope that he could guide the destinies of Smallwood, Cohen, James, and Massey into the paths of profit.

After dinner—a somewhat unhappy function—was concluded, George Andrews rose and began to speak.

'Gentlemen,' he said, staring importantly at

Cohen, who was, as remarked above, thirteen and stout, 'I will be brief. It will be evident that I have not invited you for the pleasure of your company' (uneasiness among the guests). 'I have asked you here to make a proposal—a business proposition.' At those magic words the long face of Smallwood became suddenly alert, displaying the highest expectations. 'I am anxious to develop the commercial instincts that lie dormant in Denver's. I want, gentlemen, to gather up the threads of your solitary labours and forge ahead. We must be patient, energetic, solvent.' At these words, so happily expressed, so apt and so full of promise, Smallwood stamped loudly, the other members of the conference united, and enthusiasm ran high.

'I want, with your assistance, to launch this new company. It will be called as you are aware, "The Progressive Democratic Mutual Benefit Society," and its activities will be directed towards a steadily increasing rate of profit, based on the whole range and practice of speculative business. It is essential in an undertaking of this character to establish public confidence. For that reason success during the early weeks is imperative. First of all, I propose to make money very "easy" in Denver's. Warrenders will follow.' He paused at those three words, and the directorate listened in a dream.

They had, in their sojourn at Denver's, never seen the coinage in a condition that could be designated as 'easy.' At that moment the telephone bell rang, and George Andrews, excusing himself, took off the receiver. 'Evening, Sir Daniel. Yes; very fit, thanks. Oh, delighted. An honour to have you on the Board. Yes; I'll invest the capital in Jamaicas. They will rise—rise and fall. What? Let you know when to sell? Yes; I'll 'phone. Picking up money? Well, it is; but you must know when to pick.'

A moment later he turned with absolute composure.

'Sir Daniel Springburn,' he explained. 'He wants Rogers, the Soap King, to be associated with us. Personally I wouldn't give a cent. for Rogers. Have no use for him—never had. But what do you say, gentlemen?'

The gentlemen sat speechless.

'Then shall we pass this resolution? "That the company be called The Democratic Progressive Mutual Benefit Society, and that the first issue of shares be thrown on the market at once—one shilling shares; also, to win the confidence of the shareholders, that the capital shall be invested to the best advantage and to ensure a quick and encouraging profit." How would five shillings per share do, gentlemen?'

Smallwood cleared his throat, and Cohen made a distracted gesture denoting entire assent.

'Very good. Now, as to the directors. My idea is to pay them 10 per cent. commission on each shareholder, the total to be divided. It is also legal for each director to purchase up to five shares. Is that agreed?'

A faint steam rose from the directorate.

George Andrews nodded, and crossing to the door, opened it and brought in a bag from the passage.

'Here, gentlemen, is a placard,' he remarked, and proceeded to pin upon the curtain an immense poster upon which the simple statement: 'DO YOU WANT MONEY?' was written in crimson lettering. At the same moment the wreckage of Potter crawled quickly across the intervening carpet, reached the door, and fled. . . .

When he floundered into Richardson he clung to him and made one single passionate appeal: 'Have you a spare bob, Rich.? Can you lend me a spare bob?'

The great detective refused sternly. A solitary sixpence stood between him and mendicancy.

'They're going to make their fortunes,' sobbed Potter.

'Who are?'

'Didn't you know, Rich.? Humphries,

Smallwood, James, Cohen, Rogers the Soap King
Sir Daniel Springburn—lots of 'em.'

Richardson clutched Potter and hurried him
away to a secret place.

'Go on,' he said sternly.

And Potter did himself proud. He had understood very little, but he had a natural gift for elaboration, and the phrase 'easy money' had coloured his mind.

'This,' said Richardson at last, 'will establish our reputations for ever. This is a *coup*—a big thing. We may even make a bit by the way. Peters will like to have a hint and, being a prefect, he can't very well buy a share himself. I begin to see,' he added thoughtfully, 'things opening out. What will a shilling be worth, did you say, Potter?'

Potter did not know. But his mind was on fire.

'About five, I suppose,' he plunged.

'Call it ten,' retorted the distinguished detective, and fumbled in his pockets. 'When can a fellow buy a share?' he asked.

'Soon. At once.'

'Then there's not a moment to be lost. Tell 'em all to buy. We are made men. Could you lend me fourpence, Potter?'

But Potter was out of sight.

And instantly the word went round. It was

M

whispered in the passages amongst the juniors; it crept into the studies of the elect. Richardson and Potter, the disparaged detectives, had made good. They told their picturesque tale and vanished. They spoke of telephones, of a secret society meeting over roast chickens, of a vision of untold wealth.

By eight-thirty that night there was not an unpledged penny in Denver's, and a select committee, including representative members of both Bats and Owls, had thanked the firm of Richardson and Potter in heartfelt accents, and more than hinted at a substantial honorarium. By nine every member of Denver's had written home, suggesting that it would be of enormous assistance to his scholastic progress were half-a-crown dispatched instantly for the purchase of new text books, the old ones being tattered through perpetual service. And in due course each parent congratulated each member of Denver's, and said an old book was like an old friend.

Shortly afterwards the prospectuses of the new society were out, and the plutocrats—Smallwood, Cohen, James, and Massey, riding upon a sea of popularity—were overwhelmed by the intense public interest in the enterprise. It puzzled them, but their protestations, their anxious explanations, their appeal that the prospectus should be read, fell

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upon empty air. Denver's knew. They were not to be put off.

By nine-thirty a deputation mobbed Humphries' room. They thundered at the door. But George Andrews was sitting with Mr. Sheringham, and paid no attention. Nor did Mr. Sheringham, who was walking up and down the room in a dejected and agitated fashion.

'So I gather Miss Henniker is not allowed to see you?'

Mr. Sheringham made a tragic gesture denoting that such was in fact the miserable prospect.

'Then don't see her,' advised George Andrews.

'My dear Humphries,' remarked Mr. Sheringham patiently, 'you are brilliant and forceful, but, as I have said before, you are young. You simply don't understand.'

'What?'

'That I must see her. That without seeing her I shall probably go insane.'

George Andrews gave the matter his consideration.

'The risk is very great,' he said.

'The greater the better. I'm reckless. I don't think Dr. Henniker quite realises how dangerous it is to write me notes like this. He is neither a sportsman nor a true gentleman.'

'Might I see?'

'Certainly. It may seem strange that a master

should confide in a new boy, but after watching you over the *Bombe Glacée à la Vénitienne* I resolved that you knew your own mind. Here it is.'

George Andrews read it slowly.

'Dear Mr. Sheringham,

'Recent events, which I prefer not to discuss, have compelled Mrs. Henniker and me to come to a decision, repugnant to us, and, I hope, not without a painful significance to yourself.

'We have attempted, I think not unsuccessfully, to take a broad view of the whole matter, but upon one aspect we must be authoritative—namely, that the acquaintance that has evidently arisen between you and Daphne is severed altogether. Such a course is judicious in every way, and you will kindly respect my wishes in the matter.

'That any ladder of mine should be utilised for such clandestine purposes has greatly shocked me, and provoked, I regret to say, an attack of insomnia.

Yours faithfully,

'FRANCIS HENNIKER.

'P.S.—I am returning your novel by hand. I had no idea you wrote in this vein, and I trust you will see the inadvisability of continuing to do so.'

George Andrews folded it up and handed it back.

'Well?' said Mr. Sheringham impatiently.

'I repeat,' remarked George Andrews, 'don't see her. If you do you risk everything——'

'What d'you mean—risk everything?'

'Your book. About the real Warrenders.'

Mr. Sheringham pondered the matter. He had completed the tenth chapter when the detestable note had reached him.

'What's a book,' he said, with abandon.

'Remember my promise. I said I'd make that book boom.'

Yes, Mr. Sheringham remembered it all right.

'But, I say,' he broke in, 'however can my book interest you as much as that?'

'Because you are going to write about Warrenders. *From the inside.*'

'Yes,' admitted the author.

'Then that is all that interests me.'

'Possibly it is, but nobody'll read it.'

George Andrews smiled.

'I think you'll find they will,' he replied, and went from the room.

In the corridor he received an ovation. Paying no attention whatever, he proceeded towards his cubicle. And again the rush for shares recommenced. At 'lights out' Denver's was insolvent. There was not a ha'penny in the House.

CHAPTER XII

It was four o'clock, and Mrs. Henniker was walking up and down the lawn beside her husband.

'I want to ask your advice, Francis,' she said, speaking and moving always with the rigidity of a pageant.

'What is it, Margaret?'

'I have nearly concluded,' remarked Mrs. Henniker, 'my chapter upon my father's religious tendencies. Although he never swerved for a moment from a firm knowledge of his own personal immortality, there is no question that he was profoundly opposed to what he called, I think so finely, "promiscuous eternity."'

Dr. Henniker, who had lived, day and night, under the shade of Mr. Pendlebury for a quarter of a century, crushed a groan with determination.

'But would it be prudent to fling such a *casus belli* into the arena?' continued Mrs. Henniker. 'Would it not involve us in a tedious and even acrimonious controversy, which could serve no definite purpose? A correspondence of that nature in *The Times*, for example, would be——'

'*Fatal*,' put in Dr. Henniker gravely.

'—admirable; but in the lesser papers might lead to a political backwash of old feuds. What we must always ask ourselves is: "Were Mr. Pendlebury walking with us here now—and *he may be*—" (taken by surprise, Dr. Henniker started violently) 'were my father confronted with such a point, what would he reply?'

'What would he not?' thought Dr. Henniker, rather invidiously, but schooled his expression to debate the point.

'You recall his vital interest in Spiritualism?'

'I do,' he admitted, with reservation.

'I need not remind you of the séance when the late Archdeacon Swift, a very volatile man even in this life, jumped into his lap——'

'As a card-table,' ventured Dr. Henniker dubiously.

'My dear Francis, how sordid. It was a table suitable for cards, that is beside the point. What affected my father so deeply was the message that came through—you recollect the words: *Manus e nubibus*, a hand from the clouds. There were, you remember, at least three readings of those words. The first seemed to me most convincing; namely, that the Archdeacon was referring to himself.'

'It was his solitary manifestation, Margaret. He never returned.'

'There was no need, Francis. He had spoken. The second, that he referred to *The Clouds* of Aristophanes, impressed my father as the key to the problem. He wrote a pamphlet on that reading alone. The third, that Professor Hand of Harvard was communicating with him by telepathy, had its adherents, but the absolute denial of Professor Hand, and his reprehensible threats of legal proceedings, cannot be altogether ignored. Personally I lean to the simplest explanation. It is brief, but those who knew the Archdeacon intimately remember him as a man of few words. Who is this person, Francis?'

Behind Blinkthorn, the butler, a youngish man, holding his bowler in his hand, a subservient young man, with an uneasy moustache, was approaching. He halted about ten paces away, and stared nervously at the dahlias, while Blinkthorn handed Dr. Henniker a card.

'Ah,' said Dr. Henniker. 'My dear, Mr. Worship, from Worship & Pettle, the house agents. Now, I wonder what he wants? Do not go, Margaret. Good afternoon, Mr. Worship, what is your business?'

The young man straightened himself, bobbed his head to Mrs. Henniker, pulled a letter out of

his pocket, dropped it, retrieved it again, and, being considerably flustered, burst into a flood of speech.

'A gentleman wrote us, sir, from London—or, rather, not the gentleman himself, but his solicitor. He made us a definite offer, sir, which we considered and acknowledged. Then, before we could consult you, the gentleman himself motored up from town, at least I believe so——'

'A moment,' broke in Dr. Henniker sharply, having long since ceased to distinguish between strangers and schoolboys: 'What gentleman?'

'A tall, middle-aged——'

It was touch-and-go at that moment whether Dr. Henniker did not cane Mr. Worship there and then.

'Never mind his appearance. How does the application of this gentleman affect me?'

'Why, sir, the Manor House.'

Dr. Henniker exchanged a quickening glance with his wife.

'Do you mean,' said Mrs. Henniker sonorously, 'that there is any cause for alarm; that, in short, the Manor House is likely to be taken on lease?'

'I do, ma'am, that's the point, I do.'

'Then it's monstrous,' announced Mrs. Henniker, 'quite monstrous. Surely you and Mr. Pettle are fully aware that the Manor House

adjoins our garden, and that in the winter months it is visible from our upper windows.'

Mr. Worship stared upon the lawn with guilty eyes.

'Of course you know. More than that, you have always assured us, in view of our position here, that under no circumstances would you permit the house to be taken. I think you will appreciate the importance, Mr. Mettle——'

'Mr. Worship, ma'am.'

'—— the importance of regarding our very natural desire for privacy. I do not threaten. I am not in any way disturbed. Let us hear no more about it.'

'Unfortunately,' pursued the unhappy Mr. Worship, 'unfortunately we have no legal ground for refusing a tenant. For a long time the house has been so neglected that all hope, or fear, of letting it has been abandoned. It has lain empty, as you are aware, for nearly fifteen years. Before that time it was used by the late Headmaster——'

'I know,' broke in Dr. Henniker shortly, 'all about that. What concerns us now is the prospect that this applicant will take the house. Has he seen it, may I ask?'

'No, sir. I thought it best to inform you at once that he is anxious to consider the matter, and

that, in short, should he make an offer, we cannot refuse.'

'I call it monstrous,' repeated Mrs. Henniker, 'that we should be blackmailed in this fashion.'

'Hardly blackmailed,' ventured Dr. Henniker, 'and, though I am far from satisfied with Mr. Worship's explanation, there is every reason to believe that this gentleman will not contemplate the necessary repairs.'

'Exactly,' agreed Mr. Worship, more happily; 'it would cost a thousand pounds to put that place in good working order.'

Dr. Henniker folded his hands behind his back, stared at the distant chimneys of the Manor House, and came to a decision.

'I would rather take the house myself,' he said, in a determined voice.

As Mr. Worship had called to promote that very solution, he hastened to remark that under those circumstances, naturally, the crisis was reduced to normal proportions.

'But surely that settles the question altogether,' said Mrs. Henniker. 'We take the house at a nominal rent. That's all.'

'Not quite,' fluttered Mr. Worship, who had a family to support; 'not altogether.'

'Oh?' queried Mrs. Henniker distantly.

'You see, ma'am, this gentleman has a prior

claim. We cannot *legally* refuse his offer. We can only inform him that, unless he takes the house in its present condition, and at a higher rent, within such-and-such a time, that his option will run out.'

'I contemplate no difficulty whatever,' said Dr. Henniker finally. 'If your client does not understand the circumstances, I will see him. It is, of course, out of the question. Most undesirable in every respect. Good day, Mr. Worship.'

They turned and resumed their regal way.

'Quite amazing,' said Mrs. Henniker.

'Mr. Huntingdon,' announced Blinkthorn.

'Here you are, Huntingdon!' cried Dr. Henniker. 'Come along! If you will excuse me, my dear,' he added, turning to his wife, 'we will just have a few minutes' chat before tea—physicians in consultation,' he cried back over his shoulder quite gaily.

Mr. Huntingdon was extremely tall and lanky, a bachelor in the early forties. Being a poorly-nourished man, and addicted to the use of patent foods, he had developed a natural tendency towards satire into a positive endowment. A cynical smile hovered upon his thin mouth, and wrinkled his yellow eyes. It was a smile that brought no sense of comfort or well-being to the Upper Third. Every public school has at least one Mr. Huntingdon.

'Now,' said Dr. Henniker, dragging forward a garden-seat. 'First of all, how are things? All right?'

'Quite.'

'Glad to hear it, very glad. Your House, my dear fellow, is an example to us all. I was only saying to Denver, the other night, what a model you are, Huntingdon. They say you rule with a rod of iron, or rather not a rod, but a tongue—ha, ha!'

Mr. Huntingdon smiled complacently. He was well aware of his particular triumph.

'Any promising newcomers in your form?' asked Dr. Henniker casually.

'They are not absolute duffers,' admitted Mr. Huntingdon. 'I can't say more. Sheringham is so good-natured——'

'Exactly. Between ourselves, Huntingdon, he is just a little *easy-going*. Charming fellow, greatly liked, but *ingenuous*.'

'Since you say so,' said Mr. Huntingdon, with an air of proper reluctance, 'I cannot but admit that Sheringham, good chap though he is, does not seem to exercise quite the right kind of influence. I know well; I cannot help forming an opinion, considering they pass on to the Upper Third from the Lower.'

'No; I fear you are right, indeed the matter has

caused me some heart-searching of late. Of course Denver will not hear a word——'

'One likes him all the better for his blind loyalties and absent-mindedness,' mused Mr. Huntingdon, naming, with every indication of affection, regrettable shortcomings in his colleague.

'At the same time,' went on the Head, 'there is one remedial change that might prove beneficial.'

Mr. Huntingdon was deeply curious.

'Have you,' asked Dr. Henniker suddenly, 'heard of a new boy called Humphries?'

'Yes. There are stories floating about. The last that came my way was that he had decided to turn Denver's into a model Stock Exchange.'

'Quite so. However baseless such stories are, they pass from mouth to mouth. I attempted to sound Denver, but he refused to believe me. He laughed at the idea.'

'How like old Denver,' mused Mr. Huntingdon again.

'I think it a pity that this boy should be in the Lower Third.'

'The greatest of pities,' said Mr. Huntingdon, going a step further.

'There is no question that he has influenced Sheringham.'

'Incredible,' murmured Mr. Huntingdon, 'and yet, of course, Sheringham is—well——'

'From every point of view it would be best if Humphries could come under your influence. That would, I feel confident, solve the problem, and leave both Sheringham and Denver out of the question altogether.'

'I think,' said Mr. Huntingdon, 'that the idea is admirable—quite admirable. This Humphries requires a touch of discipline.'

Dr. Henniker could not deny it. It was his belief that the sooner Humphries was handled in the right spirit the better.

'I will see Denver about it,' he remarked; 'I think I can persuade him that I am acting in no personal spirit in the matter.'

'How could that be?' smiled Mr. Huntingdon. It was, of course, absurd to imagine such a thing.

'Ah,' cried Dr. Henniker, 'here is Daphne.'

She came towards them with the unmistakable air of a young thing crushed and blighted, but forgiving everybody and loving them just the same. She gave Mr. Huntingdon a sad little smile and, so as not to wound her father, said it must be the heat that had given her a slight headache. At which Dr. Henniker stared hard at the sky, and finding it clear and guiltless, led the way to the drawing-room.

After tea, being pressed by Mr. Huntingdon, who had lingered in some distress around her empty

plate, Daphne rose and promised to sing something. Dr. and Mrs. Henniker, relieved to see her aroused from a state of gentle melancholy that was getting a little hard to bear, were even prepared to tolerate one of Daphne's favourite songs—which were many things, but neither gentle nor melancholy. Mr. Huntingdon grovelled upon a low settee beside her, staring upwards. He was in a deeply emotional condition.

'I think,' said Daphne, in a low, dreamy voice, 'this is my favourite song *now*.' At the last word Dr. Henniker stirred uncomfortably, and gave a scarcely audible cough. He was becoming less and less certain about that note to Sheringham.

Touching a few entirely tearful notes, Daphne sang :

'What is hope? A smiling rainbow
Children follow through the wet;
'Tis not here, still yonder, yonder;
Never urchin found it yet.'

Dr. Henniker raised his head and, hoping that it was one of those brief modern songs, discovered it wasn't, and began to feel rather badly.

'What is life? A thawing ice-board,
On a sea with sunny shore;
Gay we sail; it melts beneath us;
We are sunk, and seen no more.'

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Mr. Huntingdon moved about an inch backwards, and surreptitiously handkerchiefed his spectacles. He had an inspiration that lovely Miss Henniker was not understood at home.

‘What is man? A foolish baby,
Vainly strives, and fights, and frets;
Demanding all, deserving nothing;
One small grave is all he gets.’

In the stricken silence Daphne swung slowly round on the music stool and resumed her haunting smile. ‘I hope it was not too pathetic,’ she said anxiously.

‘Charming, Miss Henniker,’ burst out Huntingdon, ‘touching, very. It is new to me.’

‘The words are by Carlyle,’ she said. ‘I have found a great deal in common with him lately. How wonderful it is to see life as it really is.’

‘I didn’t know you had ever read Carlyle,’ said Mrs. Henniker, with a distinct note of exasperation.

‘Didn’t you, mother,’ said Daphne gently.

Overcome by a scene that was growing increasingly trying, Dr. Henniker pushed back his chair.

‘How about the garden,’ he remarked busily, ‘show Mr. Huntingdon the flowers, Daphne.’

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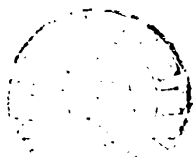
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‘ Please, Miss Henniker.’

Daphne moved softly towards the window, halted a moment, smiled the same forgiving smile at both her parents in turn, and passed on. At her side, Mr. Huntingdon walked on air, knowing that, after such a song, only one course lay open to a man of spirit.

In the security of the shrubberies, Mr. Huntingdon underwent such obvious symptoms denoting that a crisis was at hand, that Daphne hastened to his assistance.

‘ Shall we go to the hammock?’ she said.



CHAPTER XIII

I

UPON the morning following, George Andrews telephoned to London, and knew that the market was reaching its zenith. By one there was every inducement for selling out. At two o'clock he decided that the hour was ripe.

It was at that historic moment that a knock sounded at the door, and Withers stood upon the threshold.

'Mr. Denver wishes to see you, sir,' he said.

'What about?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'It's awkward,' replied George Andrews, 'very awkward just now. Would you inform Mr. Denver that I can see him for a few minutes at three o'clock. He will understand.'

The butler made a faint noise, like the frightened cry of an infant.

'Mr. Denver is in one of 'is moods,' he murmured, 'it would be a pity——'

But George Andrews cut him short.

'You see how I'm placed,' he said sharply, 'I cannot leave the 'phone. Mr. Denver is perfectly



aware that it is impossible to concede to him at times like these. It might be quite fatal.'

Withers trembled at the knees. Speech failed him.

'Don't you hear me?' snapped George Andrews. 'Here, take Mr. Denver this note.' He sat down at the typewriter and rattled off a few words. 'If the matter is urgent,' he said finally, 'ask him to step up here.'

The telephone bell rang, and as Withers trailed miserably to the door he heard the opening words: 'That you, Sir Daniel?' and fled. He had read of men's hair turning white at times like this. The apprehension was not removed by Mr. Denver's expression, while he studied the business-like apology of George Andrews.

'Tell Master Humphries to come here *immediately*.'

Withers sought the passage. He had aged considerably. He toiled disconsolately up the stairs. George Andrews was standing by the window. Something had evidently put him in a better humour.

'Wants me now, eh? All right. The truth of the matter is this, Withers, Mr. Denver must keep up appearances with me. He'll have a chat, and then I'll run back.'

Downstairs, Mr. Denver paced up and down his

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room. He decided that he must not act precipitantly. He recalled that Humphries was not strong. At the same time he was not blind to the fact that the Head had spoken rather curiously about him.

The door opened and closed.

'Come along, Humphries,' he said, looking up. 'I did not quite like the tone of your message, nor do I appreciate receiving notes from new boys. Perhaps you can offer some explanation.'

George Andrews, thankful at the prospect of a chat with an intelligent person, sank into an easy chair, and rested one stout leg across the other. He laughed courteously, realising that of course Mr. Denver was having his little joke. Just as though he were a little boy like Charles Lucifer.

'I recollect,' he remarked pleasantly, 'that once, in Chicago, in the fall of '05, I missed the connection to New York City. It was awkward, because Julius K. Buttermead—not to be confused with Theodore Y. Buttermead, the Steel King—was booked to meet me——'

Mr. Denver, who was sorting some papers, turned hastily and regarded George Andrews with abnormal intensity. He had not confused the Buttermeads. He was prepared to leave the whole question of the Buttermeads in absolute uncertainty and speculation.

George Andrews, musing upon his eventful past, edged his back still deeper into the cushions, and stared reminiscently into the fire.

'Humphries!' broke in Mr. Denver, 'really——'

George Andrews gave him a slow, comprehensive glance. Then he held up one hand. He felt it absolutely necessary to put the housemaster at his ease.

'But while I'm here,' he said, 'I want you to forget all that. I want to forget it myself. You'll help me, I know. For instance, I shouldn't have sent that note. I want to impress upon you, if I may, that I am just a boy like that profoundly obtuse Charles Lucifer. I want you, sir, to go on acting the part——'

'Acting a part,' echoed Mr. Denver huskily.

'Good,' commended George Andrews, highly amused. 'Couldn't be better, sir.'

'But I'm not acting a part,' persisted Mr. Denver.

'Splendid!' cried George Andrews. 'The stage, sir, lost a fine figure of comedy in you.'

'So it did, did it? The stage, eh? Lost a fine figure of comedy. Now, let me inform you once and for all——'

There was a knock at the door. With a struggle

George Andrews was on his feet. He gave Mr. Denver a little meaning squeeze on the arm.

'Be serious,' he said gravely; 'for my sake as well as yours. You must not overdo it.'

To preserve Mr. Denver's sanity, the gaunt face of Withers peered round the door, and announced Master Springburn.

Charles Lucifer, the heart and soul of the anti-George Andrews party, appeared. He cast his enemy a look of deep hatred, and then stood as a junior should, with downcast eyes and an appearance of simplicity and innocence.

Mr. Denver recovered himself with an effort. He fumbled amongst his papers. He sank into the chair vacated by George Andrews.

'Let me see,' he said, in his vague manner, 'Springburn, kindly wait a minute. I want to see you afterwards. Now, Humphries, I have been discussing you with Mr. Sheringham, and, though he is opposed to the idea—perhaps rightly—I feel, for reasons that do not concern you, that it might be best were you to be under Mr. Huntingdon.'

George Andrews, glancing at his gold watch, a habit he never wholly conquered at Warrenders, and which clearly indicated that he grudged the time, shook his head emphatically.

'Impossible,' he said with decision.

'What's that?'

Leaning one elbow upon the bookshelf, and, in a tone at once confidential and frank, George Andrews remarked : ' The fact is, Mr. Denver——'

' I will not be spoken to like that——'

George Andrews nodded approvingly. For a moment he had forgotten that Charles Lucifer was with them. The farce of master and boy must be maintained a little longer.

' The fact is, sir, Mr. Sheringham and I understand one another. It is quite conceivable I might not care about Mr. Huntingdon. More, I have no belief in the practical importance of the subjects upon which stress is laid. If I may say so, speaking quite as man to man——'

' No ! you may not,' shouted Mr. Denver, ' but you will reply to my questions. Do you know Latin ?'

' So far as I am concerned,' said George Andrews, with a composure that shot like ice through the anxious ear of Withers at the key-hole, ' you will draw a blank in Latin, Greek, Algebra, Euclid, Drawing, Football——'

Mr. Denver made a frantic gesture. It signified that he had heard enough. To anybody but George Andrews, infatuated as he was by a blind faith in the housemaster's discretion, it would have signified more—much more.

‘Then you know nothing,’ he remarked, not without a gloomy and mysterious satisfaction.

‘Pardon me!’ retorted George Andrews; ‘but there I must strongly differ—most strongly. I know nothing of the things this little boy here knows, but I’ve travelled all over the globe, sir; I’ve been in business for many years; I’ve worsted Hiram Connecticut in the Wall Street panic of ’07; and I’m worth—speaking not in dollars, but in English gold—about——’

‘Springburn, the cane,’ said Mr. Denver crisply, and the mind of man (and particularly Withers), was left to clutch hopelessly at empty air concerning what George Andrews was really worth. What followed was almost incredible to George Andrews. For a moment he was resolved to refuse point-blank to carry the joke any further. But as it was evidently Mr. Denver’s whim, even anxiety, that he should bend over the chair, he did so in the full knowledge that the ordeal was merely ceremonial and to impress Charles Lucifer. Mr. Denver knew what was best. How they would laugh together when the farce of boy and master was laid aside, and Charles Lucifer and his kind were out of earshot.

Swish!

It struck George Andrews at once that there must be a mistake somewhere. The uneasy

prompting was accentuated by the second stroke. It grew into a conviction at the third. At the fourth he uttered one mournful howl of genuine anguish, and attempted to remonstrate. But Mr. Denver had warmed up. He clutched him by the shoulder and made good play; and George Andrews wept and squirmed, and presented, when all was over, a pitiful spectacle.

But to Charles Lucifer, thirsting for the moment when he would, like some herald of old, proclaim the glad tidings, the painful scene was all too brief.

‘And now, Springburn,’ remarked Mr. Denver, breathlessly, ‘let this be a lesson to you too. In this rebuke for insubordination there should be a message for us all. Go, Springburn!’

Springburn went. And with his going the news sped madly that George Andrews, that legendary figure, upon whose shoulders the destinies of Denver’s rested, was only a new boy standing in a corner. In that bitter hour of disillusionment Denver’s knew that it was doomed. Panic swept like a prairie fire from corridor to corridor. It invaded the studies. One of the earliest indications of how popular feeling was running was the pursuit of Richardson and Potter, and their detention in the bath-room, for them an anxious vigil.

Meanwhile, facing the wall-paper, George

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Andrews thought. He concentrated. After a few minutes he turned towards Mr. Denver.

'Sir,' he said.

'Silence, Humphries.'

'I must speak. The interests of others are involved.'

Mr. Denver frowned.

'I must telephone—at *once*.'

Mr. Denver considered the point. Perhaps Humphries was unwell.

'Very good,' he said.

'Thank you, sir.'

'Do not move. Here is a pencil and paper. Write out your message, and if it is of urgency I will telephone myself.'

'Impossible!' burst out George Andrews.
'Preposterous!'

'Very good,' remarked Mr. Denver, 'very good. Kindly sit down at the table there and write out, until I stop you: "I must strive to control my temper." Slowly, please, your handwriting is deplorable, worse than an office-boy's. I'm afraid, Humphries, your father, with his sense of business accuracy and detail, would be amazed to see you so employed.'

'He would,' said George Andrews, with emphasis.

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'You would not like to wound your good father's heart by such incompetence.'

'How often must I inform you,' screamed George Andrews, in an outraged falsetto, 'that I'm worth in *pounds*, not dollars——'

'Enough, Humphries. Take up your pen, and cease from biting the holder in that childish fashion.'

There was an uncomfortable pause.

'May I bring down my typewriter?' asked George Andrews. 'I could run off carbon copies of this in no time.'

'You may not leave this room until I permit you.'

After that, and during the hour of the great slump in Jamaicas, George Andrews, of Lombard Buildings, E.C., wrote with tragic frequency and no moral benefit: 'I must strive to control my temper,' while the fortunes of Denver's sank and dwindled and the cause of plutocracy went crashing to the ground.

II

It was five, and upon his bed George Andrews found four telegrams. The last was timed three-thirty o'clock, and it told of a heavy fall. He read

it thoughtfully, and turned to his fellow-directors—Smallwood, Cohen, James, and Massey.

‘Bad news,’ he said.

Upon the face of every plutocrat hung the shadow of the deepest misgiving.

‘But the meeting,’ stuttered Smallwood. ‘What’ll they say?’

‘What can they say? Shareholders have no power in a situation like this. We must launch another company, that’s all. More capital, and another prospectus.’

‘There is no more capital. Besides they’ll go for us.’

‘Nonsense.’

A gloomy silence fell on the party. Downstairs the shareholders were gathering. They had heard awful rumours. Springburn had stated without shame that the whole thing was a swindle. The cross-examination of Potter was so unsatisfactory that the entire firm of private inquiry agents were placed in the bath to cool. Meanwhile the terrified financiers took thought for the future. At five forty-five James slipped from the room. George Andrews was busied about a ledger—he noticed nothing. A moment later Cohen rose and tip-toed out of sight. Smallwood and Massey exchanged glances. ‘See you downstairs,’ they said to George Andrews, and were gone. The plutocrats had fled.

George Andrews paused. He frowned. From downstairs came a shout, a sound of running footsteps. It was followed by a low, buzzing noise. That was familiar. It was the shareholders talking together, saying what they thought. George Andrews knew how to manage shareholders. He was always within the law. Suddenly there was a clatter of footsteps in the playground below. To his amazement he saw a great surging crowd rushing headlong after Smallwood and Massey. Further away the rotund figure of Cohen was heading for the pond. He swerved at the brink, was cut off, and entered the water with a splendid splash. George Andrews realised that his fellow-directors were as good as lost. He considered the problem, and found the future dark and unfathomable. He realised that soon the whole of Denver's would stampede in his direction. First, Mr. Denver; now, the House. At that moment of mental crisis Withers came down the dormitory in his inevitably discreet fashion.

'They're coming up, sir,' he said, watching George Andrews curiously. He was perfectly collected.

George Andrews nodded absently. Then, crossing the floor, he locked the door.

'I would give a hundred down,' he said bitterly, 'to avoid this.'

'Very good, sir.'

'Why do you say that?'

The butler permitted himself a faint smile.

'Seeing how you were placed, sir,' he said delicately, 'and having a little bit on myself, I took the liberty of 'phoning at two forty-five.'

'Now that,' said George Andrews handsomely, 'is what I call big business. Open the door.'

Instantly half Denver's poured within. They streamed in a solid mass towards George Andrews. Outside, the corridor was black with the desperate shareholders of The Progressive Democratic Mutual Benefit Society.

George Andrews raised his hand, an efficient stylographic stuck between the plump fingers.

'I understand you have a grievance,' he said.

They shouted for two minutes without pausing.

'If I can assist you I will.'

'You've swindled us!' shrieked a small boy, who had lost a penny in a junior sweep.

'Withers,' said George Andrews sharply, 'take down that gentleman's name. I'll have counsel's opinion on that statement.'

'We want our money!' howled the sea of faces.

George Andrews took a letter out of his pocket and read it placidly until the riot was over.

'If you will permit me to speak,' he said, 'I will endeavour to explain the position.'

'We don't want your explaining, we want our

money,' chanted the shareholders, who had decided to adopt a firm stand.

George Andrews was hurt. His face hardened. He had never imagined any body of reasonable people existed who could dispense with his advice.

'Very well,' he said, with exactly the same aloof sense of justice as Mr. Denver upon a recent occasion, 'very well.'

'Rush him, you men!' shouted Milbank, who had borrowed sixpence, and saw no light in the darkness.

'Silence, please!'

George Andrews stared for some time at Springburn, and began to speak.

'One of the necessary qualities in commerce,' he said, 'is self-control. To-day, to test the spirit of the Company, I gave the impression that the market was unstable. It was. But before it fell the transaction was concluded. Will you prefer your money now or——'

His last words were drowned in acclamation.

The shareholders roared: 'For he's a jolly good fellow.' They made what apology was possible to Richardson and Potter. They explained to the unfortunate directors that any little misunderstanding was influenced by nervous excitement rather than malice. And the shame-faced Smallwood, Cohen, James, and Massey knew that

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George Andrews was more than a financier. They saw in him a potentate. Only Springburn cherished the truth. Only Springburn, solitary, unbroken, abided the future with calm and resolute soul. He would never forget George Andrews folded over the arm-chair. Never.

About an hour later George Andrews addressed the enthusiastic shareholders again.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'this is but the beginning. Very shortly I hope to introduce to your notice a proposition that has, I believe, a quite unprecedented future.'

They shouted from full pockets. George Andrews knew that the ramparts of the fortress were scaled. Only Charles Lucifer remained.

'Withers,' he said later, in the seclusion of the butler's pantry, 'nothing could have turned out better than that panic. It has bled them. The rest will follow without a hitch. Here is a cheque for you. You've earned it, every penny.'

The butler took it up, and having stared at it for some time, glanced at George Andrews and back again.

'I've cleared five thousand myself to-day,' said George Andrews, to relieve a silence that was becoming painful.

'This puts me up to four hundred,' said Withers. 'It's like one of them farces, sir. On the stage.'

The telephone bell rang in the passage, and with an effort he controlled his voice and took off the receiver.

'Sir Daniel Springburn, sir,' he said over his shoulder, 'in a terrible way because you never advised him about the shares to-day.'

'How could I,' snapped George Andrews, querulously. 'Tell him to have patience.'

Withers retired to the 'phone and listened attentively. After a little he gently closed the pantry door with his foot, whether with a hope of smothering Sir Daniel's oaths or of hiding his surprise and horror, George Andrews did not trouble to decide. He had forgotten about Sir Daniel. He only remembered the indomitable Charles Lucifer.

'Look here, sir,' said Withers at last, and speaking in a tone at once low and insinuating; 'let me assist you in these matters. They only require handling. Likewise being on the spot. I beg your pardon, sir. Commission on profit? Certainly, sir, if you prefer it. More business-like. As you wish, sir. Could you speak to Master Humphries? I would advise not. The young gentleman has passed through an episode, sir, that may or may not 'appen to any young gentleman. Yes, sir, with Mr. Denver' (and then in a hushed tone) 'No, SIR; *not on the 'ands.*'

CHAPTER XIV

I

THE Upper Third was not an intellectual form. Its members were either comparatively elderly and lethargic men of the world, or precocious and eager for prestige, satellites of Mr. Huntingdon. George Andrews came into their midst like a sea-breeze. Even Binyon, who had grown grey under the taunts of Mr. Huntingdon, admitted with reluctance that, looking into the past, there had never been anything quite like George Andrews. As a rugged conservative his words should carry weight.

Rumours of an incredible character had drifted about Warrenders during the week which saw the juniors driving in cabs to afternoon school. But so far as the outer world was concerned, there was no cause for actual excitement. That was provided when George Andrews encountered the sardonic Mr. Huntingdon, who, together with quite a number of his calling, was really intended by the Creator to be knifed as a tyrannical Eastern potentate. The Upper Third, who did not love him, also saw no future without him, and

accordingly grovelled and squirmed, and when he was particularly telling, sent up a sad and urgent laugh.

Mr. Huntingdon was extremely promising that morning. The scene with Daphne Henniker on the preceding evening had worked up wonderfully. Looking back on it, he was saddened and humiliated at the things he had said. Her ultimate refusal, given with extraordinary and lingering pathos, had been quite intolerable at the time. She was compelled, in fact, to refuse him twice, once at the hammock, and again by the dahlias.

Consequently, Mr. Huntingdon was grateful for George Andrews. He watched him enter the classroom rather late, watched him approach, and then (a pleasant little habit of his) remained watching him. It paralysed ninety-nine new boys out of a hundred. It left George Andrews cold.

'Well,' said Mr. Huntingdon, 'and who are you, little stranger? Whither away?'

The Upper Third, perceiving he was in good form, tittered sympathetically.

'Are you addressing me?' asked George Andrews.

'Addressing you!' responded Mr. Huntingdon, in mock horror. 'How could you imagine such a thing?'

George Andrews had devoted no time to humour.

He was rather puzzled, and hastened to come to business.

'This is,' he resumed, 'the Upper Third, is it not?'

Mr. Huntingdon was deeply serious. He looked searchingly at Binyon, who quivered with apprehension.

'Binyon,' he asked. 'I appeal to you, as the oldest inhabitant, as one who, in fair season and in foul, has never harboured idle ambitions for personal advancement—tell this anxious stranger: Is this the Upper Third? Take thought, Binyon, and, if you have any reason to believe it is the Upper Sixth, say so boldly and without a blush.'

Binyon, who was sixteen and corpulent, no sooner heard the last word than he went crimson, stuttered, clutched at empty words, and was submerged.

'Douglas,' pleaded Mr. Huntingdon, pouncing on a red-haired Scotch boy. 'Douglas, awake, and instead of inking your fingers write out two hundred lines before to-morrow. Meanwhile, relieve us of this intolerable tension.'

But Douglas only grinned sheepishly.

'The Northern reserve,' commented Mr. Huntingdon; 'they give nothing away. So it falls to me to reply to you that this is the Upper Third, until your arrival, deeply engrossed in their Cicero.'

They will not thank you for this interruption, young sir. They are pining to continue. Is that not so, Smith?'

Smith sniggered nervously. He had learned by painful experience to admit nothing, to deny less.

'So tell me—whisper low—to what pleasant origin do we owe your presence here? Who, in fact, are you?'

'My name——'

'Did you say "sir," inquired Mr. Huntingdon, with the air of a man slightly deaf, 'it is a little local custom here—servile, even childish, but picturesque—a survival.'

'My name, sir, is Humphries—George Andrews Humphries.'

'Not *the* Humphries,' Mr. Huntingdon begged to know, humbly.

George Andrews took his words in all sincerity.

'Certainly,' he replied; 'though I trust you will not lay any stress on the fact just now.'

The Upper Third shuddered at the words, which were from that moment handed down in the traditions of Warrenders. Then they gaped at Mr. Huntingdon. They trusted him to prove equal to the crisis. By a supreme effort he succeeded. The famous satirical smile was frozen on his lips. It

was ghastly, but it was still a smile. It held its own.

'I have been advised,' continued George Andrews concisely, 'to attend your instruction during the remainder of this term. In some respects I am sorry. Mr. Sheringham and I have much in common. I have a great respect and, if I may say so, affection for Mr. Sheringham. But Mr. Denver and I had a little chat over the whole question, and I may say, I hope without offence, sir, that he spoke most highly of you.'

The Upper Third shivered and clung to their desks. They bore the strained expression of men passing through a time of grave national peril.

Mr. Huntingdon's historic smile was losing ground. It was giving way in places. It was hardly a smile at all. But he was not beaten. By no means.

'Thank you,' he said. 'I'm sure we all appreciate this signal honour. You would not prefer this chair, would you, Humphries, and the rare privilege of conducting the Upper Third in Cicero? No; you surprise me.'

'I am not indifferent to the courtesy, Mr. Huntingdon—far from it—but, speaking with absolute candour, I do not know a word of Latin. Much as I would like to oblige you, you see how I am placed. I could not deliver the goods.'

Mr. Huntingdon wearied of this. He pounced.

'Deliver the goods,' he repeated, with a dangerous air of mystification, 'deliver the goods. You marked that, Binyon? Humphries begs to state he cannot deliver the goods. It is a jolly little phrase—more associated with groceries, perhaps, than Warrenders, but what of that? This is a democratic age. When you are an Alderman, Binyon, as I'm sure you will be, you may also run a haberdasher's shop—one never knows. Then think how important it will be for you to know the accurate mode of commercial intercourse. If you are out of woollen vests what will you say? That you can't—speak up——'

'Deliver the goods,' muttered Binyon sheepishly.

'Splendid. Offer them drawers instead.' At such a homely aside the Upper Third sent up a loud congratulatory shout of laughter. They were sorry for George Andrews, but they simply could not afford to support the losing side, and Mr. Huntingdon was winning all along the line. He had overwhelmed George Andrews with ridicule, against which even greater financiers have fallen at the first shaft.

'I like the sound of it,' resumed Mr. Huntingdon reflectively. 'I should not like us to slip back into our prehistoric ways and old-fashioned speech. It

is like a leading article in the *Nation*, disquieting but virile. The new movement. Douglas, to remind you that everything I say is suggestive and stimulating, will you kindly bring me a hundred lines to-morrow? And now, Humphries, so that even Binyon may never forget those glowing words—that pageant phrase—would it trouble you to write them on the blackboard? You will find the chalk on the ledge there.'

'Sir!' expostulated George Andrews.

'I am all attention.'

'This is absurd.'

'We are very childish here,' smiled Mr. Huntingdon, and rising, took George Andrews firmly by the ear, and giving it a skilful tweak, drew him over to the board. 'There we are; and now, as we are short, we had better stand on this chair, and, taking the chalk in our fingers so, write slowly and with modesty: "George Andrews Humphries cannot deliver the goods." Write it in Greek, since, "speaking with absolute candour," you do not patronise the Latin tongue.'

'I don't know Greek,' muttered George Andrews.

'Don't know Greek? Dear me. What are your attainments, may I ask? Tell the Upper Third, Humphries, who know very little indeed, whether you know anything at all.'

'I speak live languages,' snapped George Andrews, 'not dead.'

Mr. Huntingdon adhered to George Andrews' ear. He twisted it with understanding.

'Then commence in French,' he said. 'Break it to the French Republic that George Andrews Humphries at a pinch fails "to deliver the goods." Inform the Italians, regretfully, that George Andrews Humphries is not a man of his word. Then, passing into Spain, proclaim——'

With a face of stone George Andrews, mounting the chair, set out on his humiliating course.

Satisfied that the little situation was nicely in hand, Mr. Huntingdon turned briskly upon the Upper Third, and made the works of Cicero very bitter to them for the next forty minutes.

At the conclusion of that spirited hour George Andrews had dusted the blackboard for the fifteenth time, and was, through pure perversity, dropping into Portuguese, when Mr. Huntingdon, staring suddenly at Croxford, begged to be allowed to share his merriment. The wretched Croxford was surprised to learn he had shown signs of levity. He protested that nothing amused him. He assumed the air of one who abhorred idle laughter. Mr. Huntingdon pressed the point. He descended on Croxford. He rapped his knuckles dreamily with the edge of a ruler.

'It's Humphries,' squeaked Croxford.

'Ah, Humphries,' repeated Mr. Huntingdon, and considered the point. It was quite improbable that Mr. Huntingdon understood Portuguese, but a solitary French sentence headed the repetition of George Andrews' avowal. In it was no negative. It remarked quite calmly: 'George Andrews Humphries delivers the goods.'

It was, to anyone who understood George Andrews, an ominous sentence. It promised so much, but indicated so little.

'Humphries,' said Mr. Huntingdon, 'Humphries, kindly step down and extend your hand. You don't like the idea, eh? *Palma non sine pulvere*—translate that, Douglas, if you please. "Palms not to pulverise without," thank you. Binyon, awake. No reply from the soundless deep. Schofield, if you please——'

One of the precocious underlings heading for the Lower Fourth submitted, succulently: 'The palm, but not without a struggle.'

'Exactly — admirable. Now, Humphries, please.'

The cane descended once, twice, but George Andrews did not flinch. He had thrown down the glove. It was left for Mr. Huntingdon to accept or refuse the issue.

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'Will you still deliver the goods, little stranger?'

'I am satisfied,' remarked George Andrews, 'that you are not aware you are running a considerable risk in this procedure.'

The cane descended. The challenge was taken up.

II

During the interesting incident in the Upper Third a scene, not without drama, was proceeding in the neighbourhood of the Manor House. Mr. Worship, having trudged up and down the road before the lodge gates, suddenly sprang into activity and awaited the arrival of a large red car. It was the client from London.

'Good morning, sir,' he said politely, as the chauffeur opened the door.

A tall man in the middle forties climbed down. He made no remark to Mr. Worship. The day was not cold, but he was heavily wrapped up, and no sooner had he reached the pavement than he hurried inside the gates and up the drive. The chauffeur acted with similar haste. He banged the door, leaped inside, and, turning, the car sped away.

Considerably disturbed by these mysterious

manifestations, Mr. Worship closed the gates and broke into a trot.

'I have the key, Mr. Henderson,' he said, glad to hear the sound of his own voice.

The thin man turned his head and nodded.

'I am informed,' he said, 'that you have been chattering.'

'Chattering?'

'I said "chattering," and I mean "chattering." Now, it won't do. I told you that I don't want gossip. I won't have it.'

'I'm sorry, sir. But if you refer to Dr. Henniker——'

'I name nobody. I merely warn you. I have my work to do here and I must be alone. Open the door, please.'

Afterwards Mr. Worship said he knew by the sharp manner in which the gentleman spoke that he must be an American. Also by his hat. But, under pressure, he maintained that, so far as he could judge, Mr. Henderson betrayed no accent, and once or twice even dropped an aspirate, which Mr. Worship, as it were, picked up.

'This is the hall,' said Mr. Worship, rather gratuitously. Mr. Henderson removed his coat and muffler. He was wearing an expensive check suit; a black tie, with a fine pearl pin; and patent leather boots.

'I must explain, sir, that the Manor House is in very poor repair.'

'So I observe.'

'It has been vacant for many years, and has no modern conveniences.'

'Well?'

'There are also grave dilapidations in the roof, the floors, the ceilings, and the stairs—there is, in a word, dry-rot.'

'Go on.'

'The outer premises are deplorable.'

'Anything else. Didn't the last people die of typhoid—are you coming to that? What about the ghost?'

Mr. Worship laughed rather uneasily.

'Another little matter. There is an applicant known to us, who does not wish his name mentioned.'

'So I imagined.'

'He wants the house.'

'Then turn him down.'

Mr. Worship knew then he was an American. It was just the kind of thing Americans said in books. And yet, about five minutes later, he could have sworn he was Scotch.

'I'm afraid we must consider a prior claim, though I am bound to add that his offer does not include the repair of the establishment.'

'Neither does mine.'

'But I think you don't quite appreciate the condition of the estate.'

'That is my affair. I am ready to pay five hundred per annum upon the following conditions.'

Mr. Worship gulped. He was a man of very quiet and methodical habits, and unused to scenes like this.

'Listen, please. You must undertake to say nothing whatever about me. You must never come here unless I send for you. You must not recognise me should you see me, and from the moment you leave this place you must forget the whole incident. Is that agreed?'

'It is,' said Mr. Worship huskily.

'Then kindly sign—here.'

With a palsied hand Mr. Worship signed.

When he laid down the pen Mr. Henderson was standing by the window. He remained standing there. He was novelette to the spinal cord. And Mr. Worship, having returned the document, presently took his departure, overwhelmed by a mystery that was no lighter because he must carry it alone.

In the street he met Dr. Henniker.

'Ah, Mr. Worship,' he cried, 'settled the little negotiation satisfactorily, I hope.'

'No, sir, I fear not.'

'Whatever do you mean?'

'My client, sir, is determined. He has made us a substantial offer—in fact a surprising offer.'

'But surely, Mr. Worship, I made it clear to you that I would go to seventy-five pounds.'

'Certainly, sir. But my client has exceeded that. *Materially.*'

'Then all I can say is that I am thoroughly dissatisfied, and I really do not think I can let the matter drop there. Who is this person?'

Mr. Worship showed a Cromwellian spirit.

'It is with respectful regret, sir,' he said, 'that I must decline to reply to that question. I am sorry. I hope you understand.'

'No!' snapped Dr. Henniker. 'I do not understand. Nor do I intend to understand. But I shall certainly see your client, and point out to him the circumstances.'

'If I might take the liberty, sir——'

'What?'

'I would not, sir. No,' added Mr. Worship firmly; 'as one who knows, decidedly not.'

Dr. Henniker opened his mouth, but no words came. He tilted his umbrella upwards, as though he would smite Mr. Worship to the ground. Then, in the same amazed and awful silence, he swept on, and, passing majestically through his garden gate, clanged it behind him.

CHAPTER XV

I

It was the amiable custom of Mr. Huntingdon to cycle into the moorland surrounding Warrenders, on Saturday afternoon. He set out at two-thirty and returned on the stroke of five. About ten days after the one-sided contest with George Andrews had commenced, he alighted at the door of Big School, walked down the corridor, and entered the form-room of the Upper Third. Seated before a desk, alone, apparently subdued, sat George Andrews.

'Ah,' said Mr. Huntingdon; 'so we prefer study to the open air, eh? We do not see our way to sackcloth and ashes yet?'

'Perhaps you do not recall the smash of Harbinger & Wright in '09?' inquired George Andrews.

'I do not, Humphries, but why?'

'They did the sackcloth stunt alightlly,' grunted George Andrews, and pursued his miserable toil.

'Is that a threat?' asked Mr. Huntingdon, with his incessant smile.

'No,' retorted George Andrews, 'some people would call it a market forecast.'

It was about an hour later that Mr. Huntingdon, resting, according to his custom, upon a disused bridge that spanned a mountain brook, was electrified by the sound of a shrill scream. It was followed by another. And then, while he stood petrified with alarm, a girl burst from a neighbouring belt of trees and ran towards him, uttering piercing cries. Mr. Huntingdon, considerably flustered and shaken, sprang down the bank and hurried to meet her. Even in the strange circumstances he was dimly aware that her costume was bizarre; probably a gipsy, he decided. He gave the matter no further thought. In pursuit of the lady, a large body of persons were rushing with every symptom of anger and vengeance.

'Antonio!' shrieked the girl, and clutched Mr. Huntingdon.

Now the situation was one requiring immediate and final treatment. With so numerous a party of people undeniably irritated by something, it was madness to encourage vague heroics.

'I'm not Antonio!' cried Mr. Huntingdon sharply. 'Don't please persist in this, miss—much better run!'

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'Not Antonio!' she echoed. 'How can you say such words? Not Antonio!'

'There he is! there's Antonio!' howled the gang noisily.

Now, although Mr. Huntingdon was keenly aware that there was a blunder somewhere, he felt that, in the heated state of the crowd, explanations might be tedious. While he hesitated and hungered for his bicycle, the girl pulled his arm in the direction of the hillside.

'Come!' she implored. 'Come, Antonio. The ponies are there. It is death to remain!'

Mr. Huntingdon faltered, was aware of an elderly stranger advancing with a stiletto, and fled. He crossed the stream like a stag, and scrambled upon a pony's back. Somebody fired a pistol, the pony gave a leap and they were off, galloping along the moorland. Mr. Huntingdon did not look about. He was no horseman—he simply gripped parcels of hair, wrapped his long feet about anatomy, and shut his eyes. He knew he was a hero, but of the strong, silent kind.

'Antonio!' cried the voice again, 'they've cut me off. Don't stop!' Mr. Huntingdon didn't. He went right on. He was too sore, too lost to all sense of manliness even to wave farewell. For, at that moment of crisis, the pony encountered a ditch, swerved, jumped down, and then jumped

up. It was a neat performance, but it made a difference to Mr. Huntingdon. It reversed him. When he opened his eyes he stared into the pony's face. This gave him such a shock that he loosened his desperate clutch. He dropped under the pony, which, being small and active, cantered his entire length and proceeded, leaving Mr. Huntingdon at the mercy of the gipsies. In the stern reality of that prospect it is probable that he forgot all about the young lady and remembered only that, as 'Antonio,' he was unpopular with a large body of strangers. He lay low. He simply stared at the sky and hoped for the best. The minutes passed and nothing happened. Hope rose. At last, with the cunning of an Indian brave, he raised his head. All over the summer landscape there abided absolute peace and desolation. They had missed him. In the general carnage they had rushed on. But they would find out and return on their tracks. With a groan, Mr. Huntingdon raised himself on one hand and peered about. He wished, at that critical moment, that, in the long ago, he had taken adventure stories more seriously. He had an instinct that only by crawling with great discomfort and science could he reach the bridge and his machine, unseen by the hawk-like eyes of the enemy. With sighs and lamentations he set out, sliding down the hillside,

his clothes torn and muddy, his back aching, his knees scraped. Every few yards he stopped, raised an anxious head above the heather, peered about, adjusted his spectacles and folded them up again, was bathed in perspiration and devoured by gnats.

About an hour later Mr. Huntingdon achieved his quest. He neared the bridge. He lay for a moment collecting his resources; then, with a leap, he was on his feet and rushing for his bicycle. A minute later and he was bent over the handlebar, tearing down hill, disappearing in a cloud of dust.

And, as he pedalled steadily along, Mr. Huntingdon knew he was a hero, and his mind was busy adding little telling touches to a real first-class adventure.

II

It was all over Warrenders next day. Mr. Huntingdon had met Mr. Sheringham as he entered the main street, and dropped a strong hint or two, with the muttered apology of the authentic dare-devil for any disorder in his clothes. He had repeated rather more to his colleague, Cuthbertson, over a cup of tea. But at dinner, warmed by a bath and goodly fare, he let himself go. He did himself

proud. He even outdid Mr. Sheringham, who, curiously enough, was sounding Mr. Huntingdon's fame like an advance agent. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, in these days of publicity, that a paragraph appeared in the local Press, congratulating Mr. Huntingdon upon his gallantry in protecting a young lady from the attack of a dangerous band of aliens. It was a courteous little notice, and the Head congratulated him in a semi-public fashion, and Mr. Huntingdon said he had done nothing at all, and was extremely frightened. At which they all laughed heartily.

Then things began to happen. Coming out of the Upper Third that morning he encountered a small gentleman with a large camera. The small gentleman said nothing, but gave a click. He repeated this operation outside Mr. Huntingdon's residence. He even climbed up a garden ladder and caught him shoving a text-book into a shelf. And in the *Daily File* next day, 'the paper with the largest circulation in the British Isles,' were photographs of Mr. Huntingdon, the hero of Warrenders. The first picture was headed: 'After a Busy Day'—the second: 'He Loves his Flowers'—and the last: 'An Hour with a Favourite Book.' Mr. Huntingdon was rather pleased, on the whole.

But there were others. There was a corre-

spondent who asked 'whether the police of this country were asleep, that peaceful ladies depended on gallant schoolmasters.' Mr. Huntingdon trusted the police would let the whole matter drop. He regarded the letter as officious. There was, in the *Bulletin*, a large photograph of the bridge where he had left his bicycle, and a cross to mark where the machine had stood. By the side of the photograph the manufacturers of the identical bicycle had a display advertisement, with his name in block type. There were also articles in various dailies on famous Huntingdons in fiction, the schoolmaster as athlete, and so on.

But that was only the beginning, the first flight of leaves before the tornado. Things were quiet just then, and, for some obscure reason, the Press accepted Mr. Huntingdon, and the public clamoured for him. He was persuaded to write 'the real story' in *Winter's Magazine*; he hesitated whether or not to accept a publisher's offer to run off a handbook on Romany; he sold his cycling suit to a famous waxworks exhibition, and waited for more. It came quick and fast. There was a shilling biography run out for the stalls. It was written by an anonymous contemporary: 'One who knew G. B. Huntingdon in Youth'—so it said in the preface; and it did him thoroughly, even including a picture of the hero at the age of eight,

standing by his Aunt Helena, and a poem of ten verses written at College, entitled 'Daffodils.' These were felt to be indeed the wounds of a friend.

It was at this stage that Mr. Huntingdon showed symptoms of restiveness. He began to dread the morrow. And the morrow never fell below his fears. It soared above them.

There was the Huntingdon Soap Company, sixpence a bar, 'gets there every time.' There was the Huntingdon Saddle, 'never lets you down.' There were articles great and small, all dependent for their prosperity upon the romantic fame of G. B. Huntingdon. Every morning brought something fresh. The thing was like a diabolical snow-ball gaining impetus. He could not move abroad but the click of cameras rattled in sullen activity at his heels. His face was known all over the English-speaking globe, and the letters he received from the outposts of the Empire were enough to make an Aberdonian cry.

And suddenly the curtain began to drop. He had not the heart to attack George Andrews. Binyon translated *Carpe diem* 'let the carp perish,' and passed on unslain; Douglas, to whom mechanics were a closed book, planned to balance the ink-pot on his thumb, and Mr. Huntingdon only sighed. The hour dragged to its close and the Upper Third streamed out. Only George

Andrews remained. He closed the door and approached Mr. Huntingdon.

'We have just ten minutes,' he said.

'I am not feeling very strong this morning.'

'Mr. Huntingdon,' he said, 'I have come to deliver the goods.'

There was a silence full of drama.

'Come to what?'

'Deliver the goods. I warned you. I was prepared to meet you on a practical basis. But you persisted in regarding your authority as a shield for persecution; I repeat, persecution. That was a blunder. Perhaps you see now it was more; it was a catastrophe.'

A look of absolute panic suddenly flashed into Mr. Huntingdon's eyes.

'This evening,' remarked George Andrews, 'you make your farewell speech. You are retiring from Warrenders. Suddenly. Doctor's orders.'

Mr. Huntingdon was relieved. He knew now that George Andrews was only mad.

'I have arranged for a banquet in the Concert Hall. Old Warrenderians are coming by a special train from town. It will be a memorable occasion. I do not want to show any animus in the matter——'

'Stop this nonsense!' shouted Mr. Huntingdon.

George Andrews consulted his watch.

'You have five minutes to decide,' he said quietly, 'do not act impulsively. You remember the first paragraph in the local paper. Would it surprise you to know that it was in type a week before your famous exploit?'

'Mad,' remarked Mr. Huntingdon hopelessly, 'quite mad.'

'You may have forgotten the query from "Anglo-Indian Colonel" as to whether you were a Cheshire Huntingdon. I drafted that the day you had the effrontery to put me in the corner. Also that charmingly verbose brochure on your early life.'

'Enough!' cried Mr. Huntingdon, in a strangled voice.

'Certainly. I only wanted to indicate how efficient had been the spade work. Am I to understand that you retire to-night?'

'Never!' snapped Mr. Huntingdon, though greatly shaken.

'Then might I ask you to glance at these pictures. They are individual scenes taken off a new cinema reel—a screaming farce entitled "Antonio."'

Mr. Huntingdon uttered a faint squeak and snatched at the photos.

'You will perceive,' said George Andrews

chattily, 'that the film opens with your arrival on the bridge. The machine was concealed under a gorse-bush just here. I cannot show you the sequence of movement, but here is a telling picture.'

It was the moment when Mr. Huntingdon was rejecting the name 'Antonio' with every indication of terror and indignation. To an unbiassed person it did not lack humour. Mr. Huntingdon passed on. He began to understand.

'This one, where you mount the pony, is quite painfully vivid,' pursued George Andrews. 'It made them all roar at the trial show. Whereas this photo, taken with your arms about the pony's neck, is, I think you will allow, quite a triumph in its way. A little gem.' Mr. Huntingdon paled and passed on. It was when he reached the scene of his progress through the gorse that he knew he was lost. The operator had squeezed a laugh out of every inch. The thing was one long scream. Even George Andrews had to turn aside, and blow his nose.

When he looked up Mr. Huntingdon hauled down his flag.

'This must be stopped,' he said.

'There is no *must*,' George Andrews corrected. 'It *can* be stopped—upon one condition.'

'That I retire?'

'I came to that decision with reluctance.'

* * * * *

The special disgorged a hundred old boys. They did not fully understand, but they were content. Few men of spirit will refuse to travel at somebody else's expense for a free dinner. They arrived and they were pledged to do themselves proud. One of them even pressed a sixpence upon George Andrews, having nearly bowled him over in the passage. George Andrews laid that sixpence past. He would not have parted with it for a thousand (not dollars).

The evening approached, and Warrenders, by special concession, watched the great men troop in to Huntingdon's feast. There was the deepest mystery overhanging the origin and purpose of the festivity, but some knew. For instance Daphne, Aunt Babette, Sir Daniel, Withers, and Mr. Sheringham.

Outside the Concert Hall George Andrews hovered—a small new boy, elbowed out of the way by the great men. He listened to the rattle of knives and forks, the hearty laughter, the noise and bustle, where expense was a matter of lofty indifference. He waited patiently, and was rewarded. Out of the suddenly hushed hall the voice of Mr. Huntingdon rose, saying things. . . .

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George Andrews listened gravely for a while, then walked in the direction of Denver's. He ascended the stairs to his cubicle, drew out his typewriter, and wrote a note to the Sunbeam Cinema Company, enclosing a cheque for five hundred pounds. It was a heap of money, but worth it, every cent.



CHAPTER XVI

I

UPON that same evening the Croomes drove over to Springburn. They did so for two admirable reasons. They were deeply interested and compassionate for Caroline's sake. There was also dinner. The latter may seem by the way. A month ago it would have been even a cause for regret. But quite recently—owing, of course, to the painful change that had overtaken Sir Daniel—the staff at Springburn had suffered calamity. From the fastness of his London Club, Sir Daniel had dismissed them; simply given them the sack. Especially the cook, an elderly and conservative woman with an affectionate regard for what is called so simply and vigorously 'English cooking.' In hot weather, as in cold, she clung to ancestral roasts and Anglo-Saxon puddings. There was no domestic, from the butler, Mr. Johns, to the merest kitchen-maid, who was not comatose through beef and beer. It was the Springburn way.

Then quite suddenly all was chaos. Mrs. Peters, the cook, received instant notice, a glowing

reference, a hundred pounds, and a silver teapot with an inscription. The same cordial, but decisive, tone was maintained with Mary, the parlour-maid; Elizabeth, the house-maid; the kitchen-maid (who had, of course, no name); and the boots. In tears and mortification they sought Miss Caroline Croome, who instantly telegraphed to her brother-in-law. Sir Daniel replied: 'New staff have left Paddington. Coming myself dinner.'

It was for this memorable function that she had asked her brother and his wife; feeling that, if it were necessary to take steps with poor Daniel, they should be taken swiftly, kindly, and in no spirit of irresponsibility. Afterwards, the new staff (if they really existed and were not simply a delusion) could be discharged and the old servants recalled.

'My dear Caroline!' said Lady Croome, when Johns had closed the drawing-room door. Her husband, Sir Herbert, the eminent lawyer, approached from the background.

'Is Daniel here?' he asked quietly.

At those words, uttered in a stage voice, and upon an occasion when the future of the Springburns was poised in extremity, Caroline raised her large, composed face, with the famous Croome eyebrows.

'Not yet,' she answered.

Sir Herbert pondered. He pursed his lips and

played with his gold watch chain, resting so massively upon his abdomen.

'When were your suspicions first aroused?' he asked.

'Charles Lucifer wrote. He said his father was acting in an extraordinary manner——'

Sir Herbert warmed.

'A moment,' he interrupted. "'An extraordinary manner.'" Can you give me an instance, a case in point?'

'All this,' thought Miss Croome, 'is helpful beyond words. There should be a leading K.C. in every house of standing.' Aloud she replied: 'Poor Daniel wished Charles Lucifer to make friends with a most undesirable little boy. He offered Charles a pound for every telegram he sent.'

'And he refused?'

'Naturally.'

'And then?'

'Poor Daniel changed. He made scenes in the house. He said if Charles Lucifer returned for the holidays he would——' Miss Caroline hesitated: 'he was a little indelicate'—she added hastily: 'he apologised afterwards.' Sir Herbert bent his head. With an effort Miss Croome controlled her emotion and continued: 'Several times he threatened that he would sell the place. Once he went up to town and was seen at the Carlton.'

'Yes?' said Sir Herbert grimly.

'Dining.'

'Alone?' inquired Sir Herbert, but rather as a piece of evidence than in any spirit of hope.

'No, Herbert, not alone.'

'How dreadful,' whispered Lady Croome, fluttering distractedly around the thin flame of innuendo.

'Since then,' continued Caroline, 'he has displayed symptoms either of restlessness or boisterous spirits.'

'Does he drink?' interrupted Sir Herbert acutely.

'No.'

'Ah!'

'He is constantly at the telephone. He sometimes arrives home after midnight. His extravagance is terrible.'

'Extravagance,' noted Sir Herbert. 'Now could you give us any little instance of Daniel's extravagance?'

'He has contracted for substantial changes in the house, new decorations, electric light.'

'All that will, of course, be cancelled,' he assured her firmly.

'He has bought two cars, a shooting in the Highlands, and compels Johns to rub hair lotion on to his scalp every night.'

'Johns can be trusted,' said Sir Herbert proudly; 'he has been here for forty years.'

'He can,' sighed Caroline; 'indeed he is a stronghold at times like these. He is so considerate, and he humours Daniel. But will he stay *now*?'

In the pause that followed that fateful word, Lady Croome drew in her breath, and then suddenly inflated her bodice.

'The new staff arrived at two,' said Caroline. 'We had no luncheon, as Mrs. Peters caught the twelve train to town. They are all French.'

'Did you say French?' remarked Sir Herbert.

'They don't speak English,' added Caroline feelingly, having no gift of tongues herself.

'Cunning of this character is significant,' said Sir Herbert. 'Daniel must be put under medical supervision at once. Are these people attending to their duties?'

'There are two chefs. Have I said enough, Herbert?'

'Chefs at Springburn!' echoed her brother-in-law, snapping his note-book. In every man, even an eminent lawyer, there is a spark of passion.

The door opened and the historic face of Johns looked in.

'The master,' he said, with simple pathos.

The council for Sir Daniel's good stirred resolutely. They rose to their feet. After all he was, in a manner, the host.

II

'Would you oblige me with the water?' said Sir Herbert, after the ladies had left the dining-room.

'Not a glass of port?' cried Sir Daniel pathetically.

His brother-in-law quickened.

'Impossible,' he said, and paused, smiling pensively. 'You mayn't credit it, Daniel, but if I took a glass of that port there I'd know it for at least sixty-four hours.'

'Nonsense, Herbert.'

'You may say so, but I assure you, my dear fellow, that it would darken my whole outlook. I would become argumentative, stupid, even intolerant,' explained Sir Herbert, and unscrewed a small bottle with the reverent air of a man handling salvation. Sir Daniel, who regarded his relative as a monument of all these imperfections, drank half a glass of port with veiled eyes, and, knowing Sir Herbert's obsession, attempted tactfully to change the subject.

'I was up in town to-day,' he said.

'Were you?' remarked Sir Herbert brightening. 'Curious, because I was up too. *In Harley Street.*' Before Sir Daniel could break away, he pushed back his dessert plate, looked with awful gravity at the label on his bottle of pilules, and embarked.

'I have been troubled for some little time,' he said slowly, 'with a feeling of distention, accompanied by cardiac trouble.' Sir Daniel, who was filling his glass, hesitated, and was overtaken by dismay.

'I have said nothing as yet to Evelyn,' he continued, with quiet heroism. 'I do not wish to alarm her, and of course it *may* be nothing.'

'Of course not, my dear Herbert,' broke in Sir Daniel heartily.

'There is no ground for vague uncertainties,' commented Sir Herbert, with some asperity; 'the question cannot be shelved so casually. Roberts, our local doctor, a sound man in many ways, attributes the symptoms to liver. That is typical of Roberts. There are at least five excellent reasons for removing the liver——'

'My dear fellow!'

'——from our diagnosis. I don't know whether you are familiar with affections of the liver——'

'No,' said Sir Daniel quickly.

Sir Herbert mused a moment. Should he embark on the liver? Or should he not? Could he do the

liver justice under half an hour? Reluctantly he realised he must leave his brother-in-law in outer darkness.

‘I called,’ he resumed, ‘on Saunders, the heart man. They say he is at the top of the tree. I can only give you my personal view that he is over-rated. I formed the poorest opinion of him. He struck me as autocratic, hasty in judgment, and not a gentleman.’

‘He may be wrong,’ comforted Sir Daniel. ‘I don’t believe for a moment there’s anything wrong with your heart.’

‘That,’ said Sir Herbert, with extreme irritation, ‘was what he said.’

In the tragic silence that encompassed those melancholy words Sir Daniel lit a cigar, and stared in a kind of coma at the walnuts.

‘I simply left,’ continued his brother-in-law, with signs of returning animation. ‘I said nothing and left. I went to Peregrine, the stomach man.’

‘I daresay you were right,’ put in Sir Daniel, and fell back on cognac.

‘Was I?’ commented his brother-in-law, ‘I wonder. To begin with, I don’t believe in Peregrine—never have. He asks too many questions. I have been interested in my stomach for many years now, and I could have given him some valuable data. Instead of listening atten-

tively, he persisted in giving advice. At random. Finally, he forgot himself so far as to say there was nothing wrong with my stomach. Nothing wrong with it,' repeated Sir Herbert harshly. 'I paid him three guineas to be told that. I took up my hat and left. *Instantly.*'

Sir Daniel, feeling they were nearing the appendix from which they might never return, rose quickly to his feet.

'Excuse me a minute,' he said, 'but it's half-past nine, and a man has motored over to see me on a matter of business. To tell you the truth, Herbert, things are moving here. I suppose you wouldn't like to make some money?'

'No, no, Daniel. Let us go back quietly to the other room.'

'What d'you mean? I only wondered whether you would care to turn over a couple of thousand?'

'Nonsense, old chap. Brace yourself. Be your jolly old self.'

'The very last thing I want to be. You're bluffing, Herbert. I tell you, I've begun to live. I'm beginning to get a move on. Ever heard of a Springburn making a fortune?'

'Never,' said Sir Herbert feelingly.

'Then how much do you think I've turned over to-day?'

'Never mind, Daniel. Forget all about it.'

‘Five thousand, me boy! Five thousand!’

‘Come, come, Daniel, be reasonable. How can you expect me to believe this?’

‘Why, the man who gave me the tip is here now.’

For a moment the eminent lawyer faltered. He came near to romance. Then his arduous training asserted itself.

‘What man?’ he asked. ‘What is this man by profession?’

Sir Daniel stuttered a moment and looked worried.

‘Tell me,’ pressed Sir Herbert. ‘Don’t you see how foolish all this is? Convince yourself, Daniel, before it is too late. What is the calling of this mysterious person? Is he a stockbroker?’

‘No,’ muttered Sir Daniel; ‘a butler.’

‘Exactly,’ said Sir Herbert sadly. ‘Shall I turn out the light? Where are you going?’

But Sir Daniel had disappeared.

III

In the billiard room, Sir Daniel begged Withers to be seated.

‘I’m glad you could get away,’ he said. ‘I suppose you came in Master Humphries’ car?’

'I did, sir. 'I must be back in two hours.'

'Have you waited long?'

'I sat with Mr. Johns. In his pantry.'

Sir Daniel nodded and drew in a table.

'Now to business,' he said. 'I'll take your telephone messages in their order. Have you a list?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then I'll read out the transactions. "October 25th, Bungalow Oil Company, two thousand shares at 15s. Sold out at 30s. Profit £1,500. Commission on £1,500 is £150."'

'Right, sir.'

"Bulawayo Kaffir Mines"—'

About fifteen minutes later Sir Daniel signed a cheque and Withers handed him a receipt.

'Whisky?' said Sir Daniel.

'Thank'ee, sir.'

'Now, what's the latest?'

The butler coughed discreetly.

'You heard, sir, I presume, that Miss Henniker is forbidden to see Mr. Sheringham?'

'Yes.'

'And that Mr. Huntingdon——'

'I did,' put in Sir Daniel, checking a smile.

'Well, sir, there is a rumour that Dr. Henniker has his eye on Master Humphries. Means trouble. Investigation. Mr. Denver, sir, is weakening. It looks as though we were a-nearing a crisis, as they

say. Mr. Sheringham is not likely to remain, and as for Master Humphries——'

'He'll weather the storm, Withers.'

The butler was not so certain.

'He frightens me sometimes, sir, does Master Humphries. I was talkin' to Mr. Sheringham only last night and he says to me: "Withers, where will it all end? I feel myself being carried away," he says. I replied: "There's only two ways with gentlemen of the Humphries stamp, sir, there's no doubt of it with either."'

Sir Daniel had not thought seriously on the ethical side of the problem.

'What will he do next?' he asked, with heightening interest.

The butler rose and looked cautiously round the room. Then drawing his chair a shade nearer, he drew a paper from his pocket, consulted it, and said: 'Something *big*, sir, if it comes off.'

'Eh?'

'Master Humphries does not take risks. Also he does not speak incautious. I will give you his message and leave the matter in your hands.'

'What is it?'

'It reads, sir: "Tell Sir Daniel Charles Lucifer must be removed at all costs." That's all.'

'Charles Lucifer! Whatever can he mean?'

'I don't know, sir, but I suspect. There is, I

suppose, in every class a conservative element against which money and skill and push can beat their heads off. That's Master Charles, sir. It's surprisin' how difficult he is.'

'I know,' groaned his unhappy father.

'So uncompromising, sir—so full of righteousness—like a rock, sir.'

'A Springburn,' said Sir Daniel brokenly.

'Even to-day, when money's easy, he has a following. To Master Charles, sir, money is less than nothing.'

'Infinitely less,' put in Sir Daniel bitterly.

'And so, sir, Master Humphries wishes him removed. There are people who do not sympathise with Master Humphries, nor what Master Humphries stands for.'

'Not many, Withers.'

'I was speaking, sir, to Mr. Johns—a pleasant old gentleman and seen the best service. Well, he couldn't see it.'

'See what?'

'Couldn't understand what you wanted with money, sir. Funny old party. Actually said, meaning no offence, of course, but only through his loyalty to the house, that he believed they were going to shut you up, sir. For your own good. A joke, of course.'

'What?' cried Sir Daniel.

'A joke, sir. I hope I have not offended you.'

'Tell me,' said Sir Daniel, 'what else did he say?'

'That Sir Herbert and Lady Croome discussed you before you returned, sir, and they have decided to consult medical and legal advice.'

'Herbert!' gasped Sir Daniel; 'my brother-in-law. This is too much. After all I've stood from his stomach.'

The butler nodded gravely.

'Master Charles, sir, has been writing home.'

Sir Daniel leaped at the words.

'Tell Humphries,' he said, 'that I'll wire for him to-morrow, and after I'm married——'

'Married, sir?'

There sounded an authoritative knock at the door. The two conspirators exchanged a look of tension. At such moments even a householder forgets the liberties of Britain.

'Go,' whispered Sir Daniel rather foolishly, and flung up the window. Outside the night was very still. Without a word Withers caught up his hat and coat, climbed over the sill, and disappeared in the shrubs. Carefully closing the sash, Sir Daniel crossed to the door, unlocked it, and threw it open. On the threshold stood Sir Herbert, Johns, and the gardener.

'Hello!' said Sir Daniel.

'I thought someone was here,' remarked his brother-in-law, glancing keenly around.

'Here,' echoed Sir Daniel innocently.

It was at once evident nobody was there.

Considerably shaken, Sir Herbert walked to the fireplace. On the billiard table stood two tumblers containing whisky.

'I take them turn about,' explained Sir Daniel, whose ancestor had perished for a lost cause.

Sir Herbert did not state whether he was or was not acquainted with the little habit. He simply conferred with Johns (who was crying) and the gardener. Then he returned.

'Shall we be turning in now?' he asked casually.

Sir Daniel was perplexed.

'Are you staying the night, then?'

'Certainly. Don't worry, old chap.'

'But you haven't your things.'

'My dear Daniel, we are old campaigners, Evelyn and I.'

At that disreputable lie Sir Daniel quailed inwardly.

'Look here,' he blurted, 'is this a joke, Herbert?'

'Yes, yes. Shall we go up?'

Ignoring the gardener, Sir Daniel went moodily

from the room, across the hall, and up the stairs. On the landing he halted.

‘Johns!’ he called.

The feudal butler raised his weeping eyes.

‘I want you to wire Master Charles to return to-morrow.’

‘That will be all right, Johns,’ prompted Sir Herbert, soothingly, and linked his arm in his brother-in-law’s.

But Sir Daniel, irritated beyond endurance, broke away and, entering his bedroom, slammed the door.

CHAPTER XVII

I

THERE is no time for imaginative work like an autumn evening. There is a grandeur, a pathos, a rich sentiment about such times that only the most ruthless or cynical can withstand. The fire burned quietly in Mr. Sheringham's study, the curtains were as yet undrawn, the yellow lamplight fell upon his bent head and swiftly-moving pen. Mr. Sheringham was spinning along. He had created Chapter 20, and knew that it was good. Any insidious questionings he stifled hastily. He simply stared pensively out into the approaching night, listened to the faint sighing of the wind, saw a leaf fall—a moving spectacle—and, with some discomfort in the throat, wrote with a heightening note of imagery and inspiration. He made Warrenders, the old school where he had once sped about in the long ago, take form and sound quite an organ note. He recalled the comings and goings and the in-betweens. He thought of all the boys with whom he had shared those golden days, and, wondering where they were all now, was compelled to pause and remove his spectacles. He

recalled the summer evenings (full of the sharp crack of a cricket ball); the winter nights (chestnuts over the juniors' prep fire); and knew that, were he to see another leaf fall at such a moment, he would sob like an infant.

'I am writing this exactly as I see it,' murmured Mr. Sheringham, laying down his pen, 'so it must be realistic. Things as they are, not things as they ought to be.'

Comforted by the reassurance of such sterling truth, he mused over the last pages, and was strongly moved. He had reached the bit where Geoffrey Hankin, the fast boy of Warrenders, who had misled crowds of promising contemporaries, is overtaken by galloping consumption, and lies propped up by pillows. Beside him (the sunset shining discreetly upon them all) are little Tom Virtue, the hero; his bachelor uncle, General Caradoc, whose classic reverses would have crushed a meaner spirit; the Headmaster (in the unavoidable absence of the Almighty); the Matron; the beautiful mother of Geoffrey Hankin; the Matron's cat; and Geoffrey's canary, Dick.

'You'll not forget to give Dick his groundsel,' wrote Mr. Sheringham, and gulped.

Then, laying down his pen again, he was overcome by a distressing thought. Was not this scene familiar? Was it not even traditional? Should,

in other words, Geoffrey Hankin be permitted to succumb at a moment when, to speak brutally, he was under expulsion and the game was up? Would not the modern school of writers preserve Geoffrey Hankin for the gallows? There was much to be said for such a view.

‘But this stopping,’ he murmured peevishly, ‘will knock the scene all to smithereens. Here I was getting along so nicely——’ Mr. Sheringham wavered at the cross-roads. His pen itched to carry on. He was like an actor-manager with all the cast stationary on the stage. And at that fateful moment, one of the most historic moments in the annals of Warrenders, the chapel bell began to ring for evensong, and, looking suddenly upwards, he watched, with misty eyes, a perfect shower of leaves falling. That turned the scale. He swooped upon the page and was lost. The General, being a man of action, said nothing, but stared with glittering eyes at the old school tower. The Matron clung to her cat, for a reason that had nothing whatever to do with the canary. The beautiful Mrs. Hankin laid one hand on little Tom Virtue’s curly head, and little Tom Virtue said: ‘Do you hear them playing cricket, Geoffrey?’ Mr. Sheringham paused. Should Geoffrey hear or should he not? Should he only smile wistfully at them all? Happy thought—let the Head round up the scene.

Dabbing his right eye, Mr. Sheringham plunged into the current and was carried away. He did not forget the sun, nor little Tom Virtue, nor the bachelor uncle, nor the Matron, nor the Matron's cat. He gave Geoffrey the last word, and turned on the chapel bell. Geoffrey's death was due. It simply couldn't be held off a second longer. It was a big moment, and the reader must get it between the eyes. . . . Then he lost nerve. There was a thing that would clinch everything. But dare he? Was it playing the game? Was it after Harold Whippet? Would Mr. Cumbermere care about it? Would George Andrews see how terrific it was?

There was a loud knock at the door.

'Wait a minute,' shouted Mr. Sheringham huskily. Should he do it? Now or never. In the story the Head had risen to his feet and indicated that all was over.

With heightening colour Mr. Sheringham snatched up his pen.

'Drawing his tall figure erect,' he wrote, 'General Caradoc saluted.'

Beyond that, frail humanity could not go.

The door burst open and he hastily, almost guiltily, closed his note-book.

'I think I've got Warrenders cornered,' remarked George Andrews curtly. The blatancy of

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such a statement, upon that quiet meditative hour, wounded Mr. Sheringham. It cut him like a stab.

'You think what?' he asked, removing his spectacles, and blinking a little.

George Andrews closed the door and sat down.

'Let me recapitulate,' he said. 'I've been so rushed this last week or two I've had no time to discuss matters with you. When I came to Warrenders I foresaw some of the obstacles that faced me. Others have turned up. There was the distrust and resistance of the juniors. That was met and its energies re-directed into another channel. To-day I have no firmer supporters in the school than the boys under seventeen. They are open to argument. After seventeen they are beyond the reach of reason.'

'At the same time,' put in Mr. Sheringham, struggling back from realism to romance, 'at the same time you only retain their support by the advantages they receive.'

'Certainly. Have you ever heard of a democracy run on any other basis? When I have progressed a little further,' added George Andrews ominously, 'I will act somewhat differently. For the moment let us consider the position. The juniors are under control. Throughout Warrenders they are united under a close corporation, and prepared to strike a blow for freedom at any moment.'

'A blow!' echoed Mr. Sheringham, rather shocked.

'They are the democracy. Above them is an aristocracy old as history——'

'The masters?'

'No; the prefects. The bloods. They belong to an exclusive caste. They tyrannise over opinion, over freedom, over progress. They are a training-ground for social deadheads, and must be removed.'

Mr. Sheringham said nothing. He was thinking of Joe Stumper, the fine, upright prefect in his book.

'As to the masters,' pursued George Andrews, 'they are dependent upon the school. I do not foresee grave danger in that quarter. You recall Mr. Huntingdon?'

'I do.'

'The method was drastic, even melodramatic. But then Mr. Huntingdon possessed in a marked degree both of those qualities. Steel meeting steel.'

'Certainly,' nodded Mr. Sheringham.

'You may say he was peculiarly open to attack. That may be so. But all masters retire before a brisk offensive. In a crisis they will not support each other. They are useless for any other line of business, and they have no financial credit. They must bow the head or go. It may perhaps save argument if I inform you that I have the power to

convince Dr. Henniker, should I consider it desirable, that his presence in Warrenders is only a matter of weeks.'

'Go on,' said Mr. Sheringham, imagining George Andrews was indulging in a ghastly exhibition of levity.

'My point is that, until the hidebound type of senior is destroyed, there will be no hope of progress either at the public schools or the universities. He is the danger-spot. Now I'll just tell you how I'm going to smash the prefects.'

He paused, and, coiling a fat finger on the inside of his Eton collar, stared into the fire.

'To-day,' he said, 'I have launched a new company and a new paper. The work has been heavy, but it has been carried through. Upon my paper, *The Progressive Weekly*, I have the ablest staff in Great Britain.'

'Where is it?' asked Mr. Sheringham, greatly shaken. 'Here?'

'It is to be the official organ of Warrenders, but for the first two or three numbers it will give no indication of its connection with the school. It will contain leading articles upon matters of democratic interest, commercial affairs, and so on. There will be a serial; one or two short stories; an important item which I cannot mention, but which has cost my literary editor, Professor Hobson, five

hundred pounds to procure; another series of a forceful character by an author who must at present be nameless; and lastly——' With a jerk of his head George Andrews gave Mr. Sheringham a piercing look.

'Yes?'

'Market forecasts. Only a few lines, but they are worth all the rest put together. They are the citadel.'

'I'm sure they are.'

'Now, about yourself. You must contribute to this weekly.'

'I should be delighted.'

'But have you the time? I may say that your book upon the real Warrenders is of infinitely greater importance in the general scheme than *The Progressive Weekly*. I look to you to accomplish what is beyond the reach of money.'

'I am doing my best,' returned Mr. Sheringham uneasily. 'I shall finish to-morrow.'

'Good. I have already communicated with Mr. Cumbermere. He is not enthusiastic; but, after considerable difficulty, I have arranged with him to rush the MS. through the press and publish it right away. I signed the cheque for a thousand for purposes of publicity yesterday. He has, I gathered, set up the first fifteen chapters already. I have in type, for his advertisements, the

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enthusiastic praise by the Bishop of Basingstoke and Canon Dugmore.'

'But they haven't seen the book.'

'No; what does that matter?'

'Oh well, if they are ready to praise in the dark I can't take the blame. But hadn't *you* better satisfy yourself about the story?'

'My dear Mr. Sheringham, I prefer to leave technical matters of that nature alone. I have no interest in such things. I never read anything beyond the financial papers. The point is, what position would you care for upon *The Progressive Weekly*?'

A gleam of fire came into Mr. Sheringham's eye. He enjoyed a vision seldom afforded an author.

'Could I,' he faltered, 'review new novels?'

'Certainly.'

'And if I might put in a few articles on the tendencies of modern fiction.'

George Andrews made a note of it.

'And one or two satirical sketches of publishers.'

'Not libellous, please.'

'Impossible!' retorted Mr. Sheringham sternly.

'Anything else?'

The House tutor softened. 'For some time,' he said tenderly, 'I have not been able to see Miss Henniker. There was, you recollect, a little

unpleasantness. I have felt rather low about it. One evening,' he proceeded, fumbling with a blotting case, 'one evening I wrote a little sonnet. I called it——'

'Yes?'

'The truth of the matter is,' laboured Mr. Sheringham, 'to be quite frank I called it: "To Daphne."'

'Well?'

'Shall I read it?'

'Certainly not. But put it in, if it isn't very long. Now listen. I said I had also launched a new company. It's a big thing. It has a future. It is called "The Humphries Co-operative Alliance Company, Limited," and its object is to abolish cash distribution and confine purchasing power to tickets. If you order anything, from a text-book to a sausage, particularly a sausage, you hand over a ticket. You will say: "What is the good of all that bother?" This prospectus will tell you at length, or, rather, it will give you some excellent reasons. If you want the truth it's this. Since I saw you last I've bought up all the shops in the place. There were exactly fifteen that affect the school. I have arranged that nothing is to be sold except upon receipt of a ticket. Now, to make the project more attractive, each sixpenny ticket commands the purchasing power of a shilling. Unless

you have a ticket you can't buy. Is that clear ?'

'Yes; but what's the purpose? The company will drop money.'

'Mr. Sheringham,' said George Andrews, 'you're right, sir. The company, like *The Progressive Weekly*, will drop money. Am I not always dropping money? Over Mr. Huntingdon, over Wingate, over your book. Lastly, I'll drop a pile over Dr. Henniker, you see if I don't. It may surprise you, but the best way to make money is to drop it first. Warrenders is a falling market. When it has reached zero I'll buy it up.'

'But what has all this to do with the prefects?'

'That is what I call a clever observation. It has this to do with the prefects, whom I prefer to style the aristocracy: To-night—in fifteen minutes—the juniors throughout Warrenders are rising.'

'What?'

'It may surprise you; but, sometimes, as in the case of Wingate, brute force is the swiftest argument. They are rising, and within an hour all will be over.'

Mr. Sheringham was shaken. He half rose from his chair, with a vague idea of warning Mr. Denver.

'You are too late,' put in George Andrews, 'listen!'

From far away came a harsh shouting, a distant buzz of voices, a crash.

‘But this—this is like the French Revolution.’

‘Not unlike,’ agreed George Andrews, with composure; ‘the principle is analogous, the ultimate result will be the same.’

Mr. Sheringham, picturing Saunders, the footer captain, aroused from his after-dinner sleep, was dubious. But he maintained a proper gravity.

‘I thought you would have been at the head of the Denver’s party.’

‘I do not agree with you,’ replied George Andrews briefly.

Outside, in the corridors, the noise was deepening. It convinced Mr. Sheringham that, in his position, he must take immediate action.

‘There is no use going to the door,’ said George Andrews, who, like the Creator, seemed to read his inmost thoughts, ‘as a matter of fact it is locked on the outside. I instructed Venables.’

A rush of footsteps sped down the passage, and there rose a shrill scream in a moving treble.

‘Did that sound to you like a prefect’s death-cry?’ asked Mr. Sheringham maliciously.

‘Some must suffer,’ said George Andrews quietly, and, rising, crossed over to the open window.

‘They are getting to work in the other houses,’

he remarked. 'It should all be over in a few minutes.'

But the racket went on with increasing violence, until even the great democrat looked restive. It passed from falsetto to baritone. It sank to the bass, where it tarried.

Suddenly there came a fidgety tapping at the door, not the confident summons of the victor. George Andrews hurried across and, as the key turned, went into the corridor, strewn with the forms of the fallen, and conferred with some person unknown. When he returned, he locked the door upon the inside.

'There has been a set-back,' he said, with a military equanimity that only General Caradoc could have equalled. 'We have been let down.'

'Let down. By whom?'

George Andrews frowned rather bitterly.

'Incidentally, by Sir Daniel,' he replied; 'for some unforeseen cause he has not carried out my instructions. There is absolute silence from Berkshire. Consequently Charles Lucifer has warned the aristocrats. I suspected it. He is,' concluded George Andrews, with the fierce certainty of youth and commerce, 'the only danger we have to reckon with.'

Again the alarming knock sounded at the door.

'Withers,' he explained, returning to his chair.

'He says the bloods have carried everything before them and the movement is dead. We shall see. If the Humphries Co-operative Alliance Company, Limited, has fallen, it has served its purpose.'

'Oh!'

George Andrews lost his temper at that futile monosyllable.

'The bloods must eat,' he said; 'they can't exist on House tables.'

'I don't quite follow.'

'They are not members of the Alliance,' explained George Andrews patiently; 'they have no food tickets.'

II

There is a dramatic moment in the afternoon when all Warrenders rushes for provender. It is then that piping sausages, steaming rolls, buttered eggs, all manner of things make up for the wise economics of House tables. It is then that the rich are envied by the poor, the fat grow more gross, and the lean less offensive. At the end of term, when money is scarce and the temperature low, it is wonderful how much simple pleasure a few coppers can command.

With a roar Warrenders came charging out of

Big School. The pathway was black with running boys. In scores of pockets hands clasped money, while even senior minds were fired with visions of Richard's hospitable counters. Dreams soon to fade so poignantly away. There was a notice—a large placard—fully visible for all to read :

NO CASH TRANSACTIONS.
TICKETS ONLY.

By Order.

Humphries Co-operative Alliance Co., Ltd.

'No what?' snorted the seniors, who had forgiven the juniors their misguided rebellion.

'Your ticket, sir,' said a strange young man behind the counter.

'Ticket be damned,' retorted a head prefect shortly.

'I'm sorry, sir. Perhaps you could purchase one from someone.' He turned indifferently aside. The seniors recoiled from the counter. They stared at one another with shocked and thoughtful gaze. They watched the impudent clamour of the Bats and Owls already staggering beneath burdens of good cheer. They became aware that things were not as they should be. Then, displaying a prudent

indifference, greatly to the mystification and chagrin of the juniors, the great men returned to their respective seats of authority, and the seniors of Denyer's summoned Charles Lucifer. That was the second conference of the aristocracy which he had attended within three days.

By a small majority the meeting decided upon instant action—a course abhorrent to Charles Lucifer and all the purest aristocrats, who forthwith headed the right wing for ignoring the juniors, withstanding the pangs of want, and behaving in a fashion worthy of their grand traditions. The left wing, being smirched with commerce and eager for reprisals, resolved to descend upon the juniors, abduct their tickets, and threaten the leaders of the movement with penalties unless the insurrection ceased. It was a plan of campaign full of promise. To take the initiative was freely acknowledged, even by the die-hards, to possess a Napoleonic flavour. It was also difficult to see how the scheme could fail, always a persuasive factor in moments of stern crisis.

Two days had passed when the seniors, empty, but full of confidence, swept Warrenders like a blizzard. They fell upon the juniors in their respective common rooms and turned them upside down. The floor was speckled with tickets of the Humphries Co-operative Alliance Company,

Limited. They dropped like autumn leaves. The whole outrage occupied but a few moments, and when it was passed the indignant juniors, harried like mice about the corridors, dusty, and confronted by absolute penury, held a secret meeting, and called upon George Andrews to throw light upon a situation that appeared to them as unfortunate in every respect.

For the last time he entered the room in his composed company-promoter fashion, listened patiently to the hysterical words of Venables, Binyon, Blythe, and Massey, and finally rose to speak.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'we are faced by a situation calling for determination, confidence, and asceticism. By an action at once arrogant and childish, a party stronger in physique have, for the moment, embarrassed us. In doing so they have equally embarrassed themselves. You say they possess our tickets. What are tickets? Can they eat tickets? Certainly not.' He paused, and, as no one saw a gleam of light, no one spoke.

'Some of you are inclined to go over to the enemy. Some of you are losing your trust in the Alliance Company. How many of you will withstand the searching ordeal of the next few days? We shall see. But remember, whenever your appetite is keen and grows keener, that the appetite

of the seniors is no less searching. I will be thinking of you, gentlemen, my sympathies will be strongly aroused.'

A growing uneasiness passed over the conference. The words of the great democrat, although full of hope, were impersonal. Some of the less honourable there recalled his absence during the tragic hour of rebellion two nights before.

'The future,' remarked George Andrews, in words that had often silenced and confused a body of hostile shareholders, 'the future is dark with problems that will require all our energies, and, if I cannot myself always be with you—remember, gentlemen, that I leave my distinguished fellow-directors—Smallwood, Cohen, James, and Massey. You know them' (satirical outburst), 'they are tried men of affairs. Through thick and thin,' perorated George Andrews, in words that chilled his colleagues to the marrow, 'through thick and thin they have represented your welfare, nourished your interests, developed the resources of this company. They have been criticised, gentlemen, in the past, and they will be criticised even more very shortly' (ironical cheers). 'Would they, because of temporary disfavour and high feeling, take advantage of resignation from this Board did such an opportunity present itself? Gentlemen, you do not know the spirit, the sincerity, the simple sense

of duty that unites the directors of this great company, if such a wretched thought could cross your minds. They are responsible, gentlemen, and they are proud to be held responsible.' (Deafening cheers, during which Smallwood shook a pale face with emphasis).

'They want you to come to them and challenge them.' (Renewed outbreak.) 'To satisfy the inquiries that are the privilege of every shareholder. They are there, gentlemen. They will be there,' concluded George Andrews, with simple and moving dignity, 'to the end.' Then, folding up his notes, he bowed and went quietly from the room.

And suddenly out of the stillness came an agitated voice, a shareholder desiring a trifling point explained.

'What about our ticket-money?'

It was a question of extraordinary uncertainty to the Board.

'Answer up,' shouted several voices.

Their proud moment was already come. Already, in the prophetic words of the great democrat, 'feeling was running high,' and would run considerably higher.

CHAPTER XVIII



I

UPON that same afternoon Daphne was half-way through 'Robin Adair.' It is a thoughtful song. To Dr. and Mrs. Henniker, treading moodily up and down the lawn, it meant a good deal. There was another favourite of Daphne's—a coronach for the death of a chieftain's only son—that would have put a butler off his feed. It was intended for 'wakes,' and no one questioned its undoubted prestige. At the end of each verse was a chorus in Gaelic, and at the conclusion of each chorus a succession of melancholy thumps in the bass. The moral upheaval of that song can never be fully appreciated. It disorganised the household. The cook, who was Irish, gave way to stimulants; the housemaid would not go upstairs unattended; while Blinkthorn, who hitherto had ranked as a bachelor of irreproachable habits, confessed to a wife whom he had not seen for twenty years.

'My dear Margaret, this must stop,' said Dr. Henniker, with sharp resentment.

'Did you see Dr. Whympers about Daphne?'

'I did, and he advised a change of air.'

'Nonsense, Francis. None of us ever required such a thing when we were young. My father used frequently to remark that the only variety desirable was that of work. When his brain was fagged he used to take a Japanese dictionary and translate a chapter of Isaiah, returning, an hour or two later, the life and soul of the party.'

Dr. Henniker was not prepared to doubt it.

'I told Whympier,' he resumed, 'that we were not satisfied that we should give in to Daphne's whims. I made it clear that the cause was known to us. Since this morning my decision regarding Sheringham has been strengthened materially. Sheringham, in a word, must go.'

'Would that be quite ethical, Francis?'

'My dear Margaret, you surely do not think I am removing Sheringham upon personal grounds. That would be most improper. I have asked him to come here this afternoon to explain certain disturbances that took place the night before last. I am informed he is in some way connected with this unrest. At the same time I will afford him an opportunity of seeing Daphne.'

'Francis!'

'A moment. I have considered the point. I am confident,' said Dr. Henniker determinedly, 'that Daphne is acting under an impulse. She is highly

strung. Neurasthenic. She does not really care for Sheringham. She has probably formed quite a different idea of Sheringham in her own mind—Why will she persist in playing that dreadful song?’

‘I thought you looked worried, Francis. Is there anything else?’

‘Everything, Margaret, everything! That boy Humphries. Really I cannot credit the things one hears. I have told him to come here this afternoon. I fear it means expulsion. It is a pity, but I must nip these tendencies in the bud. There are actually boys here now who are interested in *commerce*.’

‘Impossible!’

‘My very word only last evening to Cuthbertson. The root of the trouble was first observed in Denver’s. Since then it has spread all over the school. Our record for games has never been so low. Why? You may well ask. We lost the match with Walton; we tied with Bexborough. Bexborough!’ wailed Dr. Henniker, cut to the heart, ‘a team that was beaten five to nil by Cromley’s. You see what it means,’ he went on, with extraordinary vehemence, ‘one can forgive a boy shirking his work—at least the Modern Side; but this growing indifference to games cannot be faced too resolutely. It might land us,’ said Dr. Henniker, speaking under strong emotion, ‘in the

downfall of the whole public school system. Would the canker stop there? Would the Empire sustain such a blow? I doubt it.'

In a tragic silence they tramped a step or two up the lawn.

'There are boys in Warrenders,' resumed Dr. Henniker, stopping and staring gloomily upon the ancient buildings, 'whose thoughts are altogether divorced from manly exercises and the classics, and who have been discovered actually engaged upon commercial enterprise. *Making money*. The idea is too painful to contemplate.'

'What would their fathers say?' remarked Mrs. Henniker.

'What, indeed!' echoed Dr. Henniker hopelessly, and stood suddenly at gaze. Blinkthorn was approaching.

'Mr. Sheringham and Master Humphries, sir.'

Without a word Dr. Henniker went swiftly up the lawn and within the house.

In the study stood the two danger-spots of Warrenders.

'Humphries, kindly step into the garden a moment,' said Dr. Henniker, and turned to Mr. Sheringham.

'I have asked you here,' he began, with immense gravity, 'for a rather painful necessity. I will be brief. I have received sufficient evidence to compel

me, as Headmaster of Warrenders, reluctantly to come to the conclusion that you have failed to appreciate the value of discipline in your position here. Is it not true, for instance, that, early in the term, you attended a disgraceful episode in which two young and innocent boys engaged in a fight?'

'It is,' admitted Mr. Sheringham.

'I am also informed that you have assisted this unhappy boy Humphries in several episodes, which have culminated in this last atrocious disturbance of Monday. In doing so,' continued Dr. Henniker, in the identical tone and melancholy grandeur of himself in Mr. Sheringham's forthcoming book, 'in doing so, you have blighted and ruined the prospects of one who might, under sympathetic and firm guidance, have won to a creditable position in Warrenders. That, Mr. Sheringham, is a thought that cannot but fill you with lifelong dismay and vain regret.'

Uttering that distressing forecast, Dr. Henniker turned his fine profile towards the unhappy Mr. Sheringham, and stared at the portrait of the great Mr. Pendlebury over the mantelshef.

'I have taken this opportunity,' he said at last, 'to allow you to resign. It is a concession, but I do not wish, nor will you desire it, any needless comment upon the matter. There is also another

item and I am done. You will recollect I wrote to you regarding my daughter. Since then she has been suffering from a foolish aberration that she has been separated from one in whom, in whom——' Dr. Henniker broke off, at a loss to express the monstrous delusion with proper contempt and severity.

'I understand,' said Mr. Sheringham nobly.

'Thank you. It is, of course, absurd, but at her age obsessions of this nature are difficult to control. It would be prudent, I think, from every point of view, Mr. Sheringham, were you to say good-bye to my daughter, explain you are retiring, and behave as naturally as possible. It would even be of assistance to Mrs. Henniker and myself.'

This trifling with sacred emotions irritated Mr. Sheringham exceedingly.

'But I am not retiring,' he said warmly.

'Not—— What did you say?'

'I repeat—I am not retiring.'

Dr. Henniker was instantly remote.

'Kindly explain your meaning,' he said.

Mr. Sheringham flushed.

'I find it a little difficult to explain,' he said.

'I am influenced by many antagonistic claims. I came here to warn you——'

'To warn ME!' echoed Dr. Henniker.

'As my future father-in-law,' said Mr.

Sheringham boldly, 'you must command, if not my affection, at least my support.'

Dr. Henniker fought for adequate words in vain.

'Please listen. Upon the one side are family ties; upon the other public engagements. From the last I cannot resign so precipitately. I have given my word that I will see the next week through.'

'To whom, might I ask?' inquired Dr. Henniker.

'To Humphries,' said Mr. Sheringham, and reaching the door, closed it hastily behind him.

II

In the drawing-room Daphne was sitting by the fire. She gave him a shake of her head as he came in.

'Trespassers will be prosecuted,' she said, but a little sadly.

Mr. Sheringham sighed.

'Trespassers *are* prosecuted,' he replied, and drew in a chair.

'Have you seen father, then?'

'I have. I have just left him. He got a great deal into ten minutes. He dismissed me.'

'No!'

'But yes! He spoke nobly. Even in my book the Head hardly touches the austerity of your father. He said things about George Andrews that I'll never forget. He was right,' mused Mr. Sheringham. 'Will any of us ever forget George Andrews.'

'I'm sorry. What are you going to do? This is not fun any longer, is it? At the beginning it was so different.'

'When Humphries came—you mean that?'

'Yes; when Humphries came.'

Mr. Sheringham looked into the fire.

'It all seems long ago,' he murmured. 'How long is it since we last met?'

'Ten days.'

'It seems more. What have you done?'

'Worried father and mother—"more in sorrow," you know. Babette made me promise to try. What have you——?'

'I've finished my book.'

'How perfectly splendid! Do tell me about it. Is it strong? Will Mr. Cumbermere like it?'

'I don't know. I remembered what you said about writing out of oneself. This is the real Warrenders to me. At the same time——'

'Well——'

'There are some passages that seem to me rather sentimental. But I have not breathed my doubts

to anyone. George Andrews, you see, is not old enough to understand. Between twenty and thirty the importance of these little episodes is so compelling.'

'What little episodes, Mr. Sheringham?'

'I believe,' he said, fumbling in his pocket, 'd'you know I believe I have one here.'

'Is it sentimental?'

'It touches,' admitted the author, 'upon the emotions. But it's true, absolutely true.'

'Is it the end of the book?'

'The curtain. The assistant schoolmaster, who is rather under a cloud, misjudged, poor man, a splendid fellow really, comes to say good-bye to the Head's daughter. The Head has told him that he must behave quite naturally, in order that she may realise that he does not love her.'

There was a moment's silence after these moving words.

'But does he?' asked Daphne diffidently.

'He adores her,' breathed Mr. Sheringham, leaning forward; 'he worships her. He—he, in fact it is one of the most pathetic passages in the whole book.'

'Doesn't she care for him, then?' inquired Daphne.

Mr. Sheringham choked.

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'He doesn't know,' he replied, his voice trembling. 'He cannot ask her.'

'Not ask her! Why?'

'Because he's leaving, and hasn't any money, and is rather an ass.'

'Your hero?'

'Yes. He is a tiresome hero and he knows it. That is his redeeming quality. But she makes up. She is beautiful, charming, and glorious. She redeems even her parents. What is he to do?'

'But I thought you had finished the book?'

'All but the last paragraph.'

'It would be a pity to end up sadly,' said Daphne dreamily.

'Fatal,' said Mr. Sheringham, breathing quickly, 'quite fatal.'

'I think,' whispered Daphne at last, 'I'd let them——'

'My own darling!' he cried joyfully. 'Do you really mean it——?' . . .

About half an hour later Mr. Sheringham went over and dispersed the assembled coronachs and laments.

'My luve is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June.'

Dr. Henniker started at the sound of the clear tenor voice.

'My luvie is like a melodie
That's sweetly played in tune.'

He hurried into the hall, and, noticing Mr. Sheringham's hat, snatched it up, suspecting the worst.

The music came to an abrupt conclusion. Outside, the night was creeping onwards, breathless, vigilant, under an open heaven.

But inside, Dr. Henniker was standing, with one arm extended towards the open French window, and Mr. Sheringham's grey felt hat, proffered like a dead bird.

'We are engaged, father,' cried Daphne, who had golden ideas upon such moments.

'Come, sir,' said Dr. Henniker briefly, 'the verandah——'

It meant climbing over the garden wall, but Mr. Sheringham had walked into a world removed altogether beyond the reach of barbed wire or fragments of broken glass. In the presence and under the eyes of Dr. Henniker he bade Daphne a lingering farewell and went with a light heart into the night.

III

The truth of the matter was, Dr. Henniker had received a severe shock. He was hardly himself. No sooner had Mr. Sheringham, duly crushed (so he believed), left him for the drawing-room, than he had called in Humphries. The interview started in the note familiar to all who have happened at some period or another to be youthful, and discovered the enormity. Dr. Henniker, that is to say, was cast for a sombre, destructive part, and the scenery—a formidable sky, with a wet ray of sunshine switched on just before the curtain.

‘Kindly be seated,’ said Dr. Henniker, ‘and answer any questions I may put to you clearly and fearlessly. Tell the truth, my boy, and remember that concealment will only involve you in fresh and perhaps deadly perils.’

‘Might I say a word?’ put in George Andrews.

‘Not yet. I do not desire an explanation—if any explanation is possible,’ he reflected dubiously. ‘I want to state my own feelings regarding your brief career at Warrenders, and to warn you as strongly as I am able; to plead with you; to be your friend,’ concluded Dr. Henniker, in a moving bass.

'I gather, then,' remarked George Andrews, 'that you are open to an offer. Very good.'

'Humphries,' said Dr. Henniker sternly, 'kindly drop this bravado. Believe me it is neither gentlemanly nor heroic. It is simply silly and rude.'

'As you please. Will you finish your statement?'

With a gathering frown Dr. Henniker resumed.

'Since you came here,' he said, 'I am informed your influence, confined though it is to the juniors, has been devoted to undesirable and unworthy ends. It has, in short, endeavoured to foster the instincts of greed, selfishness, and gambling.'

'I deny that—absolutely!'

'Silence, please! Warrenders, Humphries, is a very ancient school, a very famous school. It has produced men who have occupied the highest positions in Church and State. Do you deny that, may I ask?'

'It is out-of-date,' returned George Andrews. 'It is running on its own impetus.'

Dr. Henniker recoiled. Then he sat in a deliberate silence.

'No one has ever questioned Warrenders,' pursued George Andrews. 'No one knows how weak its foundations have become. A falling market and it will succumb. Examined practically

and what does it stand for? It is expensive; provides poor food (is, in fact, dependent on its extras); teaches very little, and that in a slovenly, half-hearted fashion; makes football and cricket its central activity; and aims at achieving a certain type. Question: "Is it a good type, or could it be bettered?"'

'I think,' said Dr. Henniker, with sudden solicitude, 'you are not very well, Humphries. I hope I have not excited you. If you wait a moment——'

'Pardon me, but I must finish. I have come here to settle this matter, and I won't leave until we have reached some agreement.'

'I will see you home, Humphries. We will go right back.'

'No, sir. To-morrow will be too late. To-night Warrenders is put on its trial. I am interested to know how long it will hold out. You say it is impregnable. I accept your view, but beg to differ. That's all. But why not be reasonable?'

'Of course, of course,' soothed Dr. Henniker. 'Now, where did we put your hat?'

'It's there,' said George Andrews shortly, 'and beside it is a note for Mrs. Henniker.'

'For my wife?'

'Payment for her "Reminiscences of David Pendlebury" in my *Progressive Weekly*.'

Dr. Henniker rallied.

'If this is not a disgraceful falsehood I shall forbid any future publication.'

'Pardon me—you won't. For two admirable reasons. In the first place, the parents would rather let Warrenders go than the market forecasts. In the second place, any interference of that autocratic nature will lead to the publication of an article already in type, and entitled: "The Real David Pendlebury."'

'There is such a thing as the law of libel.'

George Andrews turned in the doorway and looked upwards at the towering form of Dr. Henniker.

'It is signed "Babette,"' he said.

That same evening the seniors poured down the hill, rejoicing in the juniors' tickets. They streamed towards Richards tuck-shop, and were brought up sharp by something that had never been seen or dreamed of. A locked door. Upon a card was written for all to read: 'This Establishment is Closed until Further Notice. By Order.'

A shout of intense anguish rose into the winter night. Juniors and seniors alike stood for one palsied moment, and then rushed towards the meaner shops of the town. They also were dark

and silent, with their blinds down and their doors shut and bolted.

At that a great despondency crept over the members of Warrenders, and hearts failed when the scanty, if honest, bread and cheese, provided for the evening repast, stood between them and starvation. Unless George Andrews——? With a stamping of feet Denver's streamed in a body homewards. They sought George Andrews high and low—in the House and in the highways. But the moon crept out and there was no sign of the great democrat. He had not returned by 'lights out.'

George Andrews had disappeared, leaving Warrenders upon a desert island.

CHAPTER XIX

I

THE dramatic disappearance of George Andrews interested every parent in the English-speaking world. Here was a boy, fresh from the loving care of his home, driven apparently to take a course at once rash and desperate, for a reason at present unknown. And the next morning a long letter—signed ‘Andrew Henderson, the Manor House, Warrenders’—proclaimed the right of every self-respecting man to be acquainted with the whole circumstances of this painful reflection upon our public school system. The shrill note of righteousness sounded, and was drowned in the clamour that burst from every organ of the Press. The first rumour of George Andrews as the sunny boy of a widowed mother, together with the photographs possessed by every office in Fleet Street, gave ground to the advertisement of £1,000 offered by Hubert Humphries for any news, favourable or tragic, concerning his son and partner George Andrews. The mysterious Mr. Henderson went one better. He offered £5,000. After that Warrenders, already fighting a losing campaign

against starvation, became a land of promise to gentlemen of the Press, detectives, amateur publicists, persons with cameras, treasure-hunters, and the general public. Things began to leak out daily. It was stated that George Andrews had visited the Headmaster upon the night of his disappearance: That the interview had been exceedingly painful, and had concerned the important question of nourishing food for growing boys: That Dr. Henniker had shut himself in his house, and refused to satisfy the natural curiosity of many people, to whom such matters were of natural and creditable importance. The British public would like to know whether Headmasters who starved the boys put under their care had any moral right to maintain an attitude which, if nothing else, strongly pointed to an acceptance of a charge hardly credible in the twentieth century. Was the food insufficient in Warrenders? that was the question. Until the point was satisfactorily answered one way or another, it was felt, from Torquay to the Island of Mull, that the cause for which George Andrews had suffered in silence would remain in the untrustworthy hands of the authorities. 'We do not think we speak too warmly,' concluded the *Daily Wire*, 'when we ask: What would the shade of Dickens say?'

All this led quite naturally into some details

regarding Warrenders, its history, its place in modern life, and, with a shout, every thoughtful man took up his pen and went for the public schools. There were articles by the gentlemen who write a thousand words to a comma on everything—from the revolutionary movement in Russia to the decay of family worship in Peckham. They wrote in no spirit of hostility (they said so), and oozed reluctant and damaging facts in every paragraph. They spoke of the poetry of Warrenders, and the word 'poetry' was like a red rag to the public. There were articles by the contributors who sign themselves 'Ex-,' followed by tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, as the tide of public interest ebbs and flows. There were biting impressionistic sketches by gentlemen given to snappy turn-about sentences, and ending: 'The train moved out. I turned to a ruddy farmer beside me. "An old school," he said. "Age with all its penalties," I murmured.' But all these were merely the scattered outposts of the invading army. The disappearance of George Andrews was overshadowed by the controversy raging over Warrenders. Professor Hobson, the editor of the *Progressive Weekly*, published a powerful denunciation of the whole public school system in its educational, recreational, financial, and stomachic aspects. He was answered, rather falteringly, it was felt, by the

Bishop of Basingstoke, who, for private and substantial reasons, disliked the task intensely. To the mutual roars of these public and academic lions the upper middle-class public united their thunder. Old Warrenderians wrote from clubs in St. James's Street, in no spirit of patience, humility, or satire, or anything else but boiling emotion, and were barely intelligible. Fathers of present Warrenderians replied in words of rather less enthusiasm, tempered with figures. It all revolved and spun about the food question, by this time an extremely concrete and acute problem at Warrenders. Added to which the host of investigators, who poured in by every train—either for purposes of exposing Warrenders or George Andrews, or both—became exceedingly hungry, and, as the shops maintained their vacant indifference, there was very practical ground for indignation.

Finally, satiated with the statistics of mutton and cheese that the youth of England did or did not devour, the Press started a fresh hare in the educational problem. It produced evidence to prove that George Andrews was not only a genius of finance, a philanthropist, and a martyr, but had, in his last famous interview with Dr. Henniker, emphasised, in passionate words, his intention to devote his remaining energies, his health, and his ability to

the cause of efficient and practical education. 'We cannot, of course, state with any sense of certainty,' concluded the *Daily Wire*, 'the actual transformation of curriculum this advanced thinker advocated. It would, however, appear to us to involve a challenge to the present system of public school education. In raising a question that affects, not simply the individual, but the whole structure of our Empire, we are removed at once from any suspicion of officious meddling, or a carping spirit'—with which weighty and moving words the *Daily Wire* hastened to usher in fifteen letters of inhuman ferocity and venom.

During these ten days Warrenders was staggering to its knees. Another and final blow was all that was needed to send it crashing to earth. It was freely rumoured that, upon Founder's Day, there would be a demonstration of a sensational and sweeping character. Uttering those intriguing and sinister words, the *Daily Wire* advised its readers to study very carefully an illuminating and pregnant article, entitled 'Warrenders: What of the Future,' by one whose name, were they in a position to print it, would thrill the entire civilised world.

II

Mr. Sheringham made his way to the office of Messrs. Crackthorn & Cumbermere, and, entering those mournful portals once again, seated himself in the dusty and neglected waiting-room. Upon the table lay the same prospectuses; upon the wall the portrait of the Rev. Rufus Peahen, D.D., still maintained its air of consolation and conformity; on the bookshelf the same problems were asked and the same perplexities righted. In the next room, but, through the partition, visible in head and shoulders, Mr. Jordan, the advertising clerk, still juggled with the *clichés* for the undoing of the casual reader. And somewhere in the great city that spread and straggled in its bewildering inconsequence, Mr. Carbunkle, the town traveller, was carrying 'the real Warrenders.' Thinking of such a prospect, Mr. Sheringham went hot and cold. He wondered whether Mr. Jordan was, at that very moment, poised between 'A Sensational Success' and 'The Novel of the Season.'

'Will you come up, sir?'

The office-boy was already speeding away. With a sense of guilt Mr. Sheringham went rushing after him.

Mr. Cumbermere was standing by the fire when

he first saw him. His attitude, the profile turned rather sadly towards the window, the thin hands gathering in the firelight behind him, was reflective. It was neither hysterical nor confident nor Celtic—simply reflective.

‘Good morning, Mr. Sheringham,’ he said. ‘One is glad of a fire in this trying weather.’

‘I thought I’d just look in, Mr. Cumbermere.’ It was difficult to modulate his voice to a formal and business-like tone. After all, *The Afterglow* had received a column in the *Critic*.

Mr. Cumbermere remained standing.

‘About your book,’ he said, looking mournfully out at the chimneys opposite. ‘I feel it only right to tell you quite frankly that—I like it. At the same time I have never found that my taste is in any way indicative of sales—quite the reverse.’

‘Not in this case,’ broke in Mr. Sheringham, laughing. ‘I learn *The Afterglow* is sold out.’

‘I know,’ admitted Mr. Cumbermere, with a rueful smile. ‘I have just been on the ‘phone with the binders. I think there is nothing worse for a book than a rapid demand. I blame Mr. Humphries’ thousand pounds. It is curious how outsiders imagine advertisement ensures a big success.’

‘But surely it has made it known?’

‘It has, Mr. Sheringham, in a sense it has. But

do you want a book like *The Afterglow* vulgarised ? Would it not be better policy to let it find its public—*without noise* ? ’

‘Supposing it didn’t?’

‘Then it could not be a really first-class piece of work, Mr. Sheringham,’ argued Mr. Cumbermere gently. ‘Not such a book as we hope and believe it is. I express no opinion—I only want to put *our* side of the question. Authors so rarely appreciate the publisher’s point of view.’

‘Then would you have preferred to refuse the thousand?’ asked Mr. Sheringham, with some irritation.

‘No; you mistake me. Did I say so? Surely not? But you see in what a difficult position it has placed us. In three days the first edition, and a large one—five thousand copies—has run out. The second is nearly exhausted. We are at this moment practically out of stock. The binders are at their wits’ end. It is the first time in my recollection,’ added Mr. Cumbermere, with genuine emotion, ‘that we have failed to carry out our obligations to the trade.’

‘It is most unfortunate,’ said Mr. Sheringham, ‘but, of course, a profit is a profit the world over.’

‘I cannot speak for other lines of business,’ said Mr. Cumbermere; ‘but so far as publishing is concerned, I sometimes wonder. One book goes

up, another suffers accordingly, and goes down. One author is inflated by success and leaves us, while six others are dissatisfied by their reduced sales and go to some other house. The ideal in publishing is to keep your list within a reasonable compass, and then each author is given an equal publicity. Already we have received half a dozen letters from authors inquiring why *The Afterglow* has been given six double inches in the *Supplement* and their novels ignored. Mr. Crackthorn and I were discussing the problem only this morning. He takes a very grave view of it indeed. There are several coming writers who have proved a substantial loss to us hitherto. Supposing they take it into their heads to leave? Authors,' concluded Mr. Cumbermere, with pathetic raillery, 'are impetuous creatures.'

'But, my dear Mr. Cumbermere,' protested Mr. Sheringham, 'supposing my book sells a hundred thousand copies. A success like that is surely compensatory?'

'I think so,' agreed the senior partner, though with no appearance of conviction. 'I think so, but then I am getting on in years. I am tempted. I might be able to retire. I say this in confidence, and I know you will respect my little weakness. Unfortunately my partners are younger. They are very modern and pushing. A great success such

as you mention is a nightmare to Mr. Hendrie. Now, had your book been anything but a big *sentimental* hit——'

'Stop!' cried Mr. Sheringham, deeply moved, 'what did you call it?'

Mr. Cumbermere was rather ruffled.

'Had it been a piece of realism such as I strongly advised—it might not have sold so well, but it would have strengthened our reputation.'

'But it is the purest realism.'

Mr. Cumbermere permitted himself a polite little laugh, and forebore from comment.

'As it is, Hendrie informs me Harold Whippet has wired for his MS. Unfortunately he picked up *The Afterglow*, and opened it at page 309. I thought the paragraph where General Caradoc saluted very touching myself, but then you see I am getting on. Whippet wrote very strongly about it. I'm sure you see how we're placed.'

Sheringham clung to his dismantled decks.

'But, my dear Mr. Cumbermere, you don't understand. In this book is the "real Warrenders." It will shock the modern world. It is a study in decay.' He began, after some fevered words, to pepper his reflections with the names of Gorky, Turgenev, and other gentlemen working in the same vein.

Mr. Cumbermere expressed no opinion himself.

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But he handed the distressed author a revise of a huge advertisement. 'Our Mr. Jordan, he remarked, 'who is considered an expert at summing up the appeal of a book, has inserted this in to-day's *Daily Mercury*.'

Mr. Sheringham stared at it vacantly.

FIRST GREAT EDITION EXHAUSTED BEFORE
PUBLICATION.

SECOND STUPENDOUS EDITION SOLD OUT.

THIRD ENORMOUS EDITION IN THE PRESS

THE AFTERGLOW.

BY

GERALD SHERINGHAM.

Crown 8vo., 6/-.

Read what the critics say:

Daily Mercury.—One of the most touching human stories of public school life that have come to us in recent years. . . . Brimful of tears and tenderness.

The Planet.—No public school man will read these pages without pride and emotion.

The Wire.—The picture of Helvers School should prove a classic. To any who question the fine spirit and meaning of our historic seats of learning, this volume should afford nothing short of a revelation.

The Bishop of Basingstoke writes—'I have not missed a page. It recalls—may I whisper it—Warrenders in every sentence.'

The Rev. Canon Dugmore—'It has the breadth the sweep, the pulse, the lofty purpose that cannot be gainsaid. What Mr. Sheringham writes must be accepted.

'Thank you,' said Mr. Sheringham huskily, and, taking up his hat, held Mr. Cumbermere's hand for a moment, and, without another word, went slowly down the stairs.

Even now he did not fully realise his enormity.

CHAPTER XX

I

UPON the morning of Founder's Day Mr. Sheringham flung down his paper, in which an advertisement in display type shouted that a fifth edition of *The Afterglow* was in the press, and surrendered himself to the blackest melancholy.

A discreet cough recalled to him the presence of Withers near the door.

'Hello!' he said.

'Good morning, sir. I am a few minutes late, but I was detained by Mr. Denver.'

Gerald Sheringham nodded. He gathered that Mr. Denver was in one of his sunset moods—a heady, mystical benevolence, permeated with vague outbursts of pronounced opinion.

'I was compelled to inform Mr. Denver, sir, that we must part. I considered it my duty to indicate that there might be changes on an even more ambitious scale, but you know Mr. Denver. A thorough gentleman, sir. Quite unreasonable.'

'You mean it may be all up with Warrenders?'

Withers hesitated. He was not given to emphatic statements.

'It has gone very smoothly, sir,' he said insinuatingly.

'What has?'

'Master Humphries' campaign, sir. It has swept the board and no mistake. I couldn't have credited it. An old institution like Warrenders. To get rid of it so simply. It's a wonderful gift, the Humphries way.'

'You admire it?'

'I do so. Emphatically.'

'Well, I don't. That's all. What I've wanted to know the last fortnight is "Where is Humphries?" What has he disappeared for? To leave us in the dark is childish and maddening. If I had had any idea he was going so far I'd have punched his head.'

The butler listened patiently.

'Certainly, sir. Master Humphries allowed for that. But, as you will readily admit, his disappearance, so sensational in a manner of speaking, was inevitable. It was in type, as they say, before ever he went; in fact, sir, it may surprise you to hear——'

'You mean the whole disgusting business was stage-managed?'

'Master Humphries' motto, sir, is: "Never leave nothing to chance." It went without a hitch. It was a beautiful performance.'

'Well, I'm damned,' muttered Mr. Sheringham.

'Do you know where he is?'

'I do, sir. I was about to say, sir——'

'Where?'

'Residing in the Manor House, sir.'

'The Manor House. With that man Henderson who was so jolly officious? Who is he anyway?'

The butler ran the palm of his right hand along the top of a chair. It was a monumental moment.

'I,' he said with the simplicity of a really great artist, 'I am Mr. Henderson.'

'Go on,' remarked Mr. Sheringham at last.

'Master Humphries, sir, has lived in retirement from the evening he left Dr. Henniker. He wishes to see you, sir, to-day for luncheon. There are several little matters he desires to run over, preparatory to the event of this afternoon.'

'Event? What event?'

'That, sir,' responded Withers, with sombre relish, 'I am not at liberty to reveal.'

Mr. Sheringham stared savagely into the fire.

'Tell me,' he said, 'has he read my book?'

'No, sir—Master Humphries has been too busy. He has also suffered a slight attack of the stomach. It is difficult, sir, to keep him from sweet things.'

'I will go at once,' said Mr. Sheringham.

He passed down the corridor, went out into the road, and walked quickly in the direction of the

Manor House. The thought of George Andrews gorging himself over the ruins of Warrenders was not a pleasant one. The whole unsavoury business of the last fortnight gave him an aching desire to take his boot to George Andrews. Now that his eyes were opened he saw him as only a nauseating little bounder, who had ceased quite suddenly to be amusing, and had grown violent and impossible.

The door of the Manor House was open. He pulled the bell, but, receiving no answer, entered and looked into the drawing-room. Upon a low couch, staring out of the neglected window, was Daphne. As he watched her she turned her head slowly, and, starting to her feet, ran towards him.

‘Gerald,’ she cried gladly. ‘I’m dying to tell you.’

‘What?’

‘Father is a brick. He sat up all night over your book. He’s been so sweet.’

‘D’you mean he liked it?’

‘He loved it—every word.’

Mr. Sheringham shook his head, kissed her, and closed the door.

‘Where is he, Daphne?’

‘George Andrews?’

‘Yes, yes.’

'Upstairs. He said he could not be disturbed till lunch. He is very busy. This afternoon——'

'Well?'

She gave a little sob.

'Oh, Gerald, whatever made us do it?'

'How could anyone know such a creature existed. He should be on a reservation?'

'And now we're all in it.'

'Up to the neck, darling—like a pirate crew.'

'What will father say? It seems so unkind turning him out. Why couldn't he have left poor father alone?'

Mr. Sheringham was strongly moved. From every point of view it was an extremely affecting and unusual position for any ordinary people to find themselves in.

'And he sat and gorged.' There was something about that Oriental sidelight that jarred on Mr. Sheringham like the clash of cymbals. While his poor father thrust a cool thousand pounds reward into the faces of the world—George Andrews gorged.

'I must see him,' he said decisively. 'I have something to tell him. It is only fair to have it out.'

'Wait, Gerald. Sir Daniel will be here in a minute.'

'Here?'

'Yes. George Andrews wired for him.'

He nodded absently, and stared out upon the lawn.

'Daphne,' he said at last, 'do you think George Andrews has pulled it off?'

'Don't you? Oh, Gerald, don't you? What chance is there now? Hasn't he told you all about this afternoon?'

'No. How could he? I didn't even know where he was.'

'He told me not to breathe a word, darling.'

'It's different with me,' explained Mr. Sheringham.

'This afternoon,' said Daphne, 'when all the fathers are in Big School, George Andrews is going to reappear on the platform. He has allowed for every detail, and his speech on the reconstruction of Warrenders on a commercial basis is already in print for all the papers. He proposes to found a rival college upon what he calls modern progressive lines. Modern languages, technical training, elements of business procedure—I forget how the prospectus runs. Each boy will be self-supporting at eighteen. He has a board of well-known business men. He showed me the list of his supporters. There are nearly a hundred fathers of Warrenders. From the Bishop of Basingstoke——'

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'He's scratched,' interrupted Mr. Sheringham, 'he plunged in the dark.'

'——to Justice Venables. He'll ruin the school, Gerald. Think of it. And where do we come in?'

'That remains to be seen,' said Mr. Sheringham, darkly.

'And, Gerald——'

'My dear.'

'I'm going to warn father. Lie or no lie.'

Mr. Sheringham considered the point from a practical, not moral, aspect.

'No,' he said; 'I can go one better.'

'Oh!'

'George Andrews will never reach Big School. He'll stop with us. Here. Or if he finds it cooler, in the garden. Besides——'

'Yes?'

'Never mind.'

'There'll be Sir Daniel and Withers. They'll back him up.'

'Here,' said he, quickly disengaging himself, 'is Sir Daniel.'

There was a sound of a car drawing up, a noise of footsteps, and smothered laughter.

In the drawing-room stood Sir Daniel and Babette.

'Auntie!' cried Daphne. 'You!'

'Why not?' asked Sir Daniel, with a great display of surprise.

'My dear,' whispered Aunt Babette, 'I had no time to tell you.'

'It took me a week to shake off my confounded brother-in-law,' broke in Sir Daniel.

Aunt Babette, with symptoms of emotion, was whispering in Daphne's ear.

'He actually came to the New Forest. What could I do? A great man like that. I was never so angry in my life.'

'It had to be,' explained Sir Daniel largely, 'I settled it in my own mind over the savoury at the Carlton—you remember, Sheringham?'

'Do you actually mean you're married?' cried Daphne.

'My dear,' said Aunt Babette demurely, 'even at my advanced age I can't motor for a week with naughty Berkshire baronets.'

'Babette,' roared Sir Daniel, greatly stirred, and gave her a resounding kiss.

'They *must* be married,' remarked Mr. Sheringham.

'Anyhow *we're* engaged,' said Daphne.

'At last,' smiled Aunt Babette lovingly, 'of course we all knew weeks ago. Come along, dear, and tell me all about it.'

'I say,' said Sir Daniel, turning to Sheringham,

'why the devil are the papers gassing about Warrenders?'

'Can't you guess the origin?'

'You have me.'

'George Andrews.'

'You're pulling my leg.'

'I'm not. Where have you been the last fortnight?'

'Living with Herbert's stomach; and then, when I broke away——' Sir Daniel halted, brimming over again.

'I know,' thrust in Mr. Sheringham, 'I expect we all feel like that. But time's precious. In a few minutes he'll be down and then the fun begins. It will be touch-and-go. Come over here and I'll explain.'

II

In a large room at the top of the Manor House George Andrews was seated before a roll-top desk. A telephone stood by his side, a typewriter lay upon a small table. In his hand was a copy of the *Daily Mercury*, containing a column review of *The Afterglow*. Throwing it down, he snatched up the *Wire*. On the news page was an article upon 'Founder's Day at Warrenders.' It was fragrant as a cottage garden. It rounded up with

a quotation from the last chapter of *The Afterglow*, where the Head leaves the old chapel for the last time. Deeply perplexed, George Andrews ripped open a letter from Mr. Cumbermere. It stated, rather plaintively, that the book was in its twentieth thousand, and quite out of hand.

‘Curious,’ he murmured.

Then there were brief little notes from the Bishop of Basingstoke, Canon Dugmore, Justice Venables, and Sir John Birkin. They one and all regretted most important and unforeseen circumstances detained them from coming to Founder’s Day.

‘Unforeseen circumstances,’ repeated George Andrews, and stared for a long time out of the window. Looking back over the last fortnight he could detect no flaw. The Press campaign had swept the country; the market feature of the *Progressive Weekly* had appealed to the most conservative heart; the aching void of Warrenders had resulted in showers of juvenile notes, in terms of immediate food, carriage paid. From every side Warrenders had been assailed. The ramparts had hardly been defended, the inner defences were carried within a week, the citadel was as good as taken. And yet during the last forty-eight hours a baffling and disturbing reaction had set in. There was a vague unrest in the air, associated with a fluctuating market.

The door opened and Withers came quickly in.

'Master Humphries, sir,' he said, 'something is wrong.'

'I know. But what is it?'

'According to instructions I went down to see the London train arrive. It was full, and excitement, as they say, sir, was running high. The gentlemen were in a state of anticipation. Yes, anticipation is the word.'

'Good.'

'The young gentlemen were there to meet them, and they all drove off in cabs as usual.'

'Well?'

'To Dr. Henniker's house, sir. They should be there now. Some of the gentlemen ordered their conveyances to stop at the chapel, sir, and all stood looking up at the clock with Mr. Sheringham's book in their 'ands. Some of the ladies cried.'

'I don't follow. What was there to cry about?'

'I was standing near, sir, and the Bishop——'

'Not Basingstoke?'

'Yes, sir. He said to Canon Dugmore, "The old clock, Dugmore," and then, fingering his copy of Mr. Sheringham's book, sir, turned to page 402 and read a bit and seemed quite broken up.'

George Andrews sprang from his chair and went

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over to the window. It commanded Dr. Henniker's lawn.

'You're right,' he said; 'they're arriving now. Is that not Justice Venables?'

'It is, sir.'

'Thank you. I think I begin to grasp the position. But before we settle anything read that paragraph on page 402. I've blundered, Withers; I believe I've blundered.'

'Sir!'

'I never read that book.'

In a distraught silence Withers moistened his thumb and found the danger-spot. 'It is the clock, sir,' he said.

'Don't chatter. Read.'

'Tom Virtue was coming out of chapel for the last time. He held his mother's hand, and, standing on the threshold, looked back. Then, without a word, he drew her out upon the mound. As they stood gazing at Helver's towers the train was signalled and they must depart. Far up, as it were beyond the reach of earth, the clock began to toll the hour of twelve. The silver notes sounded and passed, sounded and passed, and suddenly, like memories recalled and never to be altogether lost, a flight of pigeons, white as morning sunshine, swept into heaven, and were gone.'

There was a long silence.

Then, uttering no word, George Andrews watched the butler go from the room, and let his eyes rest upon the Hennikers' garden below. After a while he turned, and, taking up *The Afterglow*, read the passage through again and laid the book down. Then locking his desk he went downstairs.

In the dining-room they all turned rather guiltily as he entered. And at the sight of that small figure with the colossal head, the Eton collar, and white imperturbable face, Mr. Sheringham felt all the old fascination and bewilderment return. Words uttered so finely a few minutes ago, talk about loyalty to the old school and so on, sounded windy and fulsome in relation to George Andrews, whose sole adherent was a designing butler. Whatever steps were necessary they must struggle against melodrama.

He stood as it might have been when he first entered Mr. Sheringham's study, a large gold watch in his hand, the same detached expression upon his face.

'Please sit down,' he said. 'There are one or two remarks I feel I ought to make.'

They waited in a guarded, rather hang-dog silence.

'To-day, gentlemen, is the day when Warrenders is on its trial. You are familiar with

the events that have aroused the spirit of criticism, and with it the voice of progress. They were crude, merciless, revolutionary, but they succeeded. Where other more orthodox weapons would have broken, they laid the defences of Warrenders in fragments. Out of the wreckage who can say what great development might not have sprung?'

There was an absolute silence, in which Sir Daniel breathed noisily.

'During the last two weeks, when Warrenders stood upon its trial, when every argument of the greatest authority was found wanting, what possible salvation could be awaited even by the most conservative? None.'

'In the whole universe, pledged, as it must be, to the cause of reason and progress,' said George Andrews, fixing his eyes upon Mr. Sheringham, who blenched, 'no voice was raised. There was nothing in heaven or earth could save Warrenders except one thing. You ask me what was that? I thought it was Charles Lucifer, and I was hitting low. You ask what it was. You all know, but I will tell you. The College clock. *Sentiment.*'

In that moment, so full of bitterness to Mr. Sheringham, Sir Daniel raised his innocent Berkshire face. He, at any rate, saw no light.

'Money, power, reason, are helpless against

it. When I read that final paragraph in Mr. Sheringham's book I put up my hands. I know when I am beaten.'

They all stirred rather unhappily.

George Andrews poured himself out a glass of lemonade.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'I think that concludes the business of the day. I wish you all good-bye.'

'You are not going,' said Daphne. 'Surely you need not leave.'

'What purpose could I serve by remaining?' She hesitated.

'I think they could do with a little of you here,' said Aunt Babette.

'Lady Springburn,' he replied, 'it is kind of you, but you do not understand. I must be all or nothing.'

Then, shaking hands for the last time, he went in the same composed fashion from the room.

'Withers,' they heard him call, 'are you coming? Is your bag packed?'

'Ready, sir. Where shall I address the labels?'

There was a pause in which Sir Daniel held his breath for one terrific moment.

'New York,' said George Andrews.

That was the Humphries touch.



